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ABSTRACT

This booklet on the Open University includes an introductory section on the system, programs of study, students, the adult learner, the teaching package, study centers, local support, and correspondence tuition. General principles of teaching by correspondence, the role of the course tutor, and student comments are covered. Support provided by the tutor-counselor to the undergraduate student at the foundation level include advisory services, individual support, organizing induction meetings, forming student groups, contacting students, and providing assistance concerning the correspondence programs and study skills. Similar services provided by the tutor-counselor to post-foundation-level students and associate-level students are described. A discussion of specialist roles of the course tutor concerns tutorial letters, taped tutorials, telephone contact, project work and project-based courses, and the student computing service. (SW)

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THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

TEACHING FOR THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

TMA FORM (PT3)

CENTRAL RECORD

SECTION 1 STUDENT TO COMPLETE

Please use a ball point pen to complete this form, and rest it on a firm surface. Make sure that your complete assignment is sent with this form to your tutor.

Name KEITH HOW

Address

Regional Code

SECTION 2 TUTOR TO COMPLETE

TUTOR'S COMME

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The Open University
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The authors would like to thank members of the Briefing and Training Sub-Committee and the Academic Secretariat who provided valuable comments and guidance

FOREWORD

The Open University is developing a briefing and training programme for its part-time staff and, in addition to the briefing meetings which are being held, has produced two publications for those who are appointed as tutor-counsellors or course tutors. These publications are edited by:

Mr C. H. Horton, Senior Assistant Secretary (on behalf of the Deputy Secretary and Registrar)

Mr J. Peters, Staff Tutor in Mathematics Yorkshire Region (on behalf of the Briefing and Training Sub-Committee)

Dr D. Sewart, Assistant Director of Studies, Regional Tutorial Services (on behalf of the Director of Studies, Regional Tutorial Services)

Teaching for the Open University is a description and evaluation of the educational roles of the part-time staff working for the Open University while the *Handbook for Part-time Tutorial and Counselling Staff* contains much of the practical information which is needed for carrying out day-to-day activities and includes the conditions of service.

Alongside these documents the University is now publishing a journal entitled *Teaching at a Distance* which contains a number of articles, contributed by full- and part-time members of staff and experts outside the Open University, in which complexities of teaching and learning at a distance are explored.

Comments on this unit, both in itself and in relation to other briefing material, will be welcomed by the editorial group on briefing and training publications. Such comments should be forwarded to Dr David Sewart, Regional Tutorial Services, The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA.

CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION	1
THE UNIVERSITY IS OPEN	1
PROGRAMMES OF STUDY	1
STUDENTS	3
THE ADULT LEARNER	4
THE TEACHING PACKAGE	5
STUDY CENTRES	5
LOCAL SUPPORT	6
CORRESPONDENCE TUITION	6
Chapter 2 THE WORK OF THE COURSE TUTOR	7
TEACHING BY CORRESPONDENCE	7
General principles	7
Particular types of comment	11
TUTORIAL TEACHING	17
TUTORIAL PLANNING	18
USE OF BROADCASTS	20
Chapter 3 THE TUTOR-COUNSELLOR'S ROLE	22
THE FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY	22
Continuity of concern	22
Support for associate students	23
Complexity and flexibility	23
Personal relationship	23
Independent learners	24
Key points in the year	24
Individual help and advice	25
Records and knowledge of student progress	26
Initiating contact	26
Choice of courses	27
FOUNDATION LEVEL STUDENTS	28
Advisory Service for Applicants	28
Individual support	28
Induction meetings	29
The teaching system	30
Study skills	30
Correspondence teaching	31
Group learning techniques	32
Individual contact	33
Assessment problems	33
Major aims of the foundation year	34

POST-FOUNDATION LEVEL STUDENTS 34
Continuity 34
Transition to higher level studies 35
Contacts with course tutors 36
Overcoming isolation 36
Study groups 36
Concern for the individual 37
Major aims in relation to post-foundation level students 38
ASSOCIATE STUDENTS 38

Chapter 4 SOME SPECIALIST ROLES OF THE COURSE TUTOR 40

TUTORIAL LETTERS 40
TAPED TUTORIALS 42
TELEPHONE CONTACT 42
PROJECT WORK AND PROJECT-BASED COURSES 44
STUDENT COMPUTING SERVICE 44
CONCLUSION 46

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Aerial view of the Open University campus

THE UNIVERSITY IS OPEN

In January 1971 the Open University began to put into operation a teaching programme designed to provide education of University and professional standards for its students in accordance with the terms of its Charter. To the casual observer such news was not necessarily eventful. The occasion might have been seen merely as the birth of yet another university institution firmly rooted in a system of higher education which was extensive, well-known and unified in its standards.

The Open University was, however, different in several important aspects. The University was open in the sense that its courses were available to students irrespective of their occupation or previous educational background. It was not residential and its students would be working for their degrees in their spare time from their own homes wherever they lived in the United Kingdom. In addition the University was open normally only to adult students over the age of 21.

PROGRAMMES OF STUDY

The University offers a BA degree which can be taken with or without honours. For the former six credits are required while for the latter the requirement is eight credits.* These credits can be taken from any of the six faculty areas, although students have always been encouraged to build a coherent degree profile to suit their particular interests and needs.** Most students are required to take two foundation courses (two credit equivalents) but some are exempted from this particular regulation because of previous qualifications.

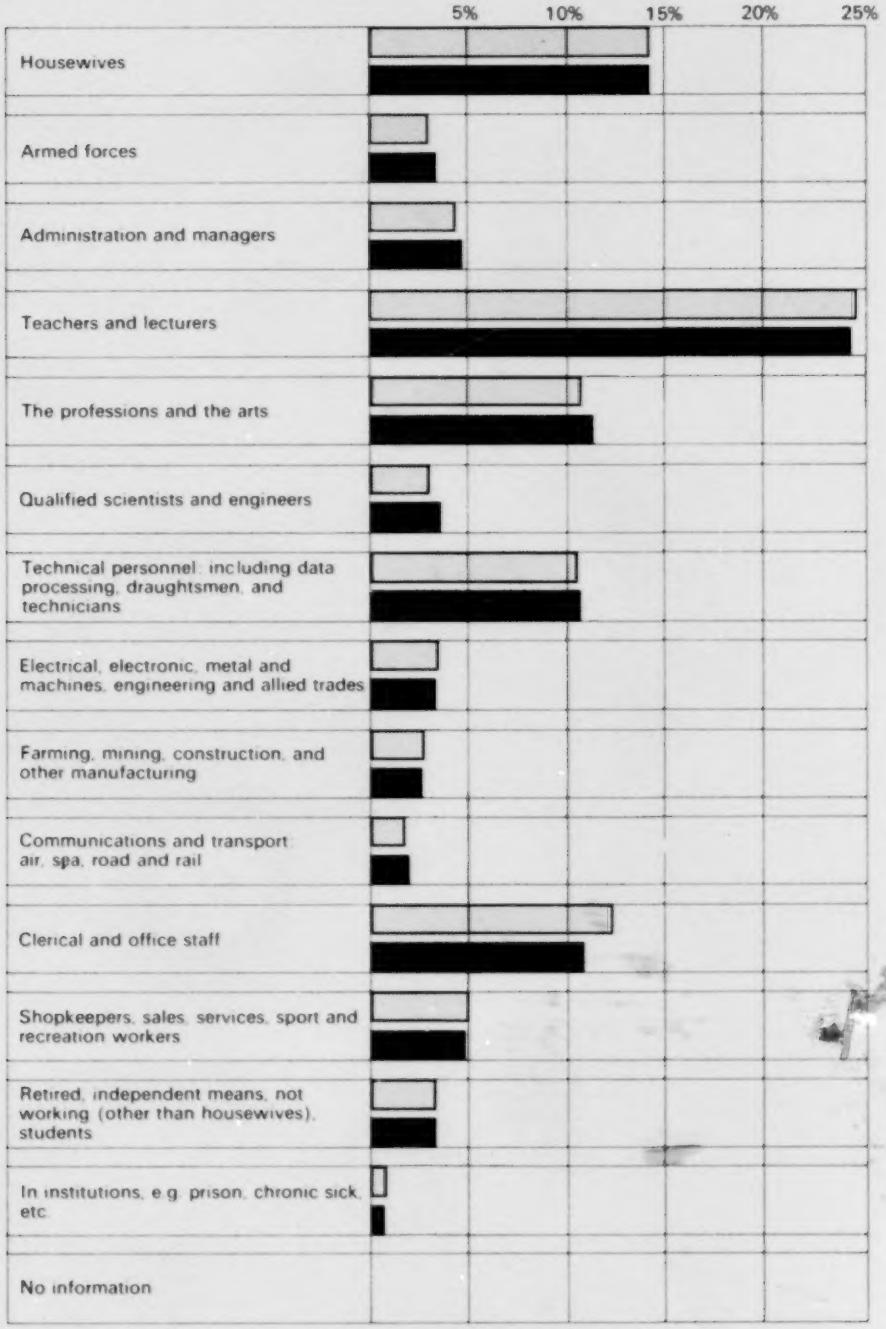
In 1973, in addition to its degree studies, the University began to offer an increasing number of courses to students who did not register for the undergraduate programme. Some of these courses were taken from the undergraduate

*See BA Degree Handbook.

**The Interest/Course Index is a recent publication in this area.

programme and some were specially produced. The Associate Student Programme, as it is now called, will gradually embrace all the post-foundation level courses which are offered in the undergraduate programme and in addition many other courses varying in length and standard. The so-called 'short courses' of approximately eight weeks' duration on various aspects of community education fall within this category. Associate students can take a single course or a combination of courses leading to a diploma and may transfer credits gained as associate students to the undergraduate system.

Table 1 Occupations of new undergraduate students



New undergraduate students
No. of students = 100%
Totals (1975) 19,823
(1976) 16,311

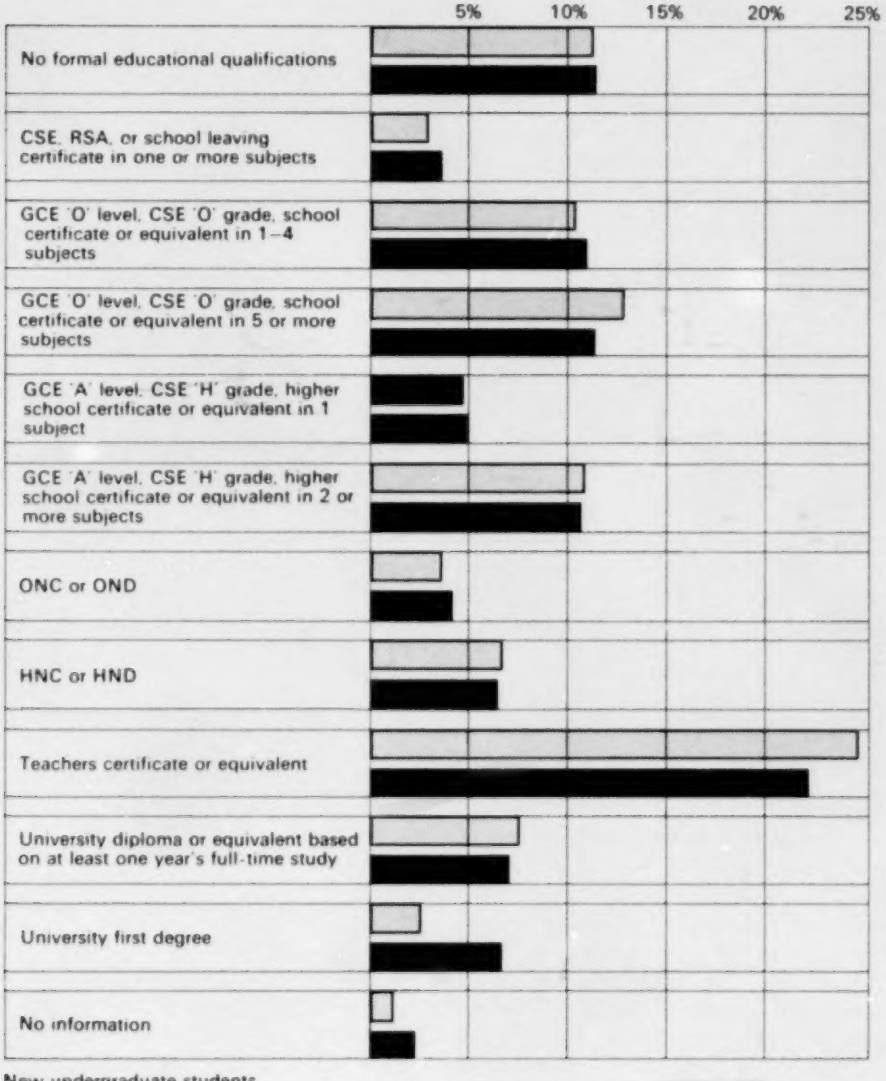
2

In addition to these structural differences the Open University's students display distinctive overall characteristics, see Table 1.

It is at once evident that the majority of Open University students are in paid employment. Furthermore, while the largest single category is teachers and lecturers, there are large numbers of housewives and clerical and technical staff and the University is also catering for a small but significant proportion of people who are retired. Clearly the demands of students from such varied occupations will need to be met by the teaching system.

There is also great variation in the previous full-time educational qualifications of students, which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Educational qualifications of new undergraduate students


5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
No formal educational qualifications
CSE, RSA, or school leaving certificate in one or more subjects
GCE 'O' level, CSE 'O' grade, school certificate or equivalent in 1–4 subjects
GCE 'O' level, CSE 'O' grade, school certificate or equivalent in 5 or more subjects
GCE 'A' level, CSE 'H' grade, higher school certificate or equivalent in 1 subject
GCE 'A' level, CSE 'H' grade, higher school certificate or equivalent in 2 or more subjects
ONC or OND
HNC or HND
Teachers certificate or equivalent
University diploma or equivalent based on at least one year's full-time study
University first degree
No information
Key
1975
1976

New undergraduate students
No. of students = 100%
Totals (1975) 19,823
(1976) 16,311

Although the presence of numerous teachers increases the overall proportion of well qualified students, it is significant that about 15 per cent of undergraduates left school at the minimum age. More recent figures show this proportion to be increasing. More significant however, in comparing Open University students, to conventional university students is the fact that almost 42 per cent of provisionally registered undergraduates had qualifications below the minimum two 'A' levels normally required for entry to degree courses at universities and polytechnics in the United Kingdom. The fact that this proportion has increased from as little as 29 per cent in 1971 makes it essential that the University's teaching system should be capable of adjusting to such major changes.

THE ADULT LEARNER

A university with a student body drawn from such a diversity of occupational and educational backgrounds must adopt a flexible provision in its support services to students. Open University students are adults. They are taking a degree, diploma or single course from home. Normally they are studying in their spare time. Their occupational background and educational preparedness is varied. In what ways are they likely to differ from the conventional undergraduate in their approach to learning? They may well be at a disadvantage in several important respects. If they are returning to education after a gap of several years they may lack confidence in their ability to study and, as a result, remain in constant fear of not doing well. We know that those with continued experience of learning as adults are best able to adapt to the new forms of learning which the Open University embraces. But the problem is not always a simple one. Often these adult students will have to master new concepts which are quite outside the range of their previous experience. They may therefore have to place their new knowledge into what might be a very rigid pre-existing framework. Since in the Open University system they may have relatively little contact with other students working on the same course, they may find it difficult to decide what 'doing well' really means and to establish reasonable goals and work patterns in relation to the course. Their part-time commitment may be difficult to work out in relation to their families and to their jobs; indeed, their part-time commitment to study might turn out to be too great in the light of these other obligations.

The main difficulties faced by many Open University students are work pressures, domestic demands and the more technical study problems of work scheduling, concentration and memory. Support from family and friends is essential in this context.

> There can be very few students who are able to study in the face of antagonism from their spouse or family. Indeed one could go further and postulate that active support is necessary for survival since the demands made on the family are great. The majority of students (58 per cent) said that their family was very happy and generally encouraging about their studies. Another quarter said that they were fairly happy but had some reservations. The families of women students as a whole are a little less supportive than the families of men students, and of older students less so than of younger students. But housewives have more support both from family and friends than women students as a whole. Friends of women students are more encouraging than friends of men students.*

*McIntosh, N. and Calder, J. (1975) *A Degree of Difference. A Study of the First Year's Intake of Students of the Open University of the United Kingdom.* A Report to the Social Science Research Council.

Evidence of this sort has implications for the local support services which the University might wish to offer students.

However, the position of Open University students is by no means wholly circumscribed by negative attributes. To become students in the first place they have had to make conscious decisions and must have conscious and continuing commitment. They have therefore shown themselves to be highly motivated, particularly since they have made a choice based upon an experience of life which is almost certainly wider than that of the conventional student and they have chosen a pathway known to be demanding. Moreover, within the modular structure of the Open University degree, they will be able to shape their degrees according to their changing interests and objectives. Each year's registration for study is a commitment to a course or courses for one year only and not to a predetermined pattern of courses which lead inexorably to a specific type of degree. Thus students may wish to study a subject for its own intrinsic interest or they might choose a degree pattern which provides a means to a new vocation. An Open University student is normally a highly motivated adult taking a degree, diploma or course in his spare time from home. How has the University's teaching system evolved to meet the requirements of such students?

THE TEACHING PACKAGE

The Open University student's tuition takes many forms. The major element is the series of correspondence units, despatched at regular intervals to the student's home. Much of the working material is designed to help him to learn for himself. The correspondence units are closely related to radio and television broadcasts and the whole teaching package of written and broadcast material is produced by a course team which is composed of central and regional academic staff, members of the BBC and educational technologists. The student must respond to this teaching material in an active way, by carrying out experiments, writing essays, working through problems, projects, etc., and while some of this work may be used for self-assessment, the majority is assessed in written form either by a tutor (tutor-marked assignments) or by the computer (computer-marked assignments). Ultimately the best of the student's assignments together with the final examination determine the award and standard of a credit.

STUDY CENTRES

Although the Open University student works mainly at home, the University has established, usually in other educational institutions, some 260 study centres sited throughout the country in areas of high population or where transport links are good. Attendance at the study centre is voluntary. They offer students a range of facilities which can supplement some of those available at home but above all they enable students to meet each other and to learn from each other in discussion groups. The study centre is also the focal point for the undergraduate students' meetings with tutor-counsellors. These meetings are an important element of the programme at foundation level where numbers normally allow provision for local contact.

The main purpose of this contact is to remedy in tutorial sessions any academic weaknesses or deficiencies of understanding and to support in counselling sessions the individual student's overall progress.

The range of correspondence units and broadcasts provides the student with information and guidance in a standard package. It is through the tuition

and counselling system, however, that this standard package is interpreted according to the student's individual needs and ability.

LOCAL SUPPORT

When they begin their studies undergraduate students are assigned to a tutor-counsellor at their local study centre. The tutor-counsellor will normally be responsible for all tuition and counselling in the foundation year, although in some instances, e.g. for the science foundation course, specialists may be brought in for particular tuition and assessment. The tutor-counsellor is available on a fairly regular basis at the study centre and may discuss strictly academic matters associated with the course or may deal with study skills on a much wider basis as well as reviewing and assisting with his students' progress in the University's unique and complex teaching system. As a supplement to these meetings, and as a substitute in cases where students cannot or choose not to attend the study centre, contact between the tutor-counsellor and student is maintained by other means, including correspondence and telephone. In addition the tutor-counsellor is responsible for marking and commenting on scripts sent to him by individual students. When the undergraduate student advances to post-foundation level courses the correspondence tuition is provided by a specialist course tutor who may in addition meet his students for tutorials or, increasingly, contact his students by other more flexible means. However, the tutor-counsellor continues to provide an element of stability and continuity in the life of the Open University student since he retains his broad role as a general educational adviser at a local level throughout the student's educational career.

CORRESPONDENCE TUITION

Correspondence tuition is the central and continuing teaching process in the Open University system. The techniques and approach of the correspondence tutor are not always immediately grasped by those who have successfully taught students in conventional full-time and part-time teaching. In the same way learning through correspondence does not always come easily to the adult student to whom such a system is generally new. At foundation level the tutor-counsellor has the responsibility for training and preparing undergraduate students for this novel method of learning. The student is asked to make a response from time to time to correspondence texts, broadcasts and other course material. This response is given in the form of an assignment. The assignment is graded and commented on by the tutor and these comments constitute the main part of the student's personal tuition. Even at foundation level, the assignment may be the only opportunity for regular communication between the student and the tutor.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the correspondence teaching function in the Open University context. In writing assignments students are reconstituting their newly received knowledge in terms of their previous experience and knowledge. The way in which they do this will depend to no small extent on the ways in which they perceive their relationship with their tutor. If they perceive the relationship as one of strict authority on the part of the tutor, their attempts to explore and to present ideas will be minimised and the educational value of the tutor-marked assignment will tend to become subservient to its role as a grading instrument. The students' initial estimation of the role of the tutor marked assignment is likely to be an enduring one. It is therefore of considerable importance that as foundation level students they should be directed to use assignments as a means of exploring knowledge within a particular framework and of receiving specific guidance which will help them to improve their work.

Course material being packed for mailing to students

TEACHING BY CORRESPONDENCE

A university which aims to teach students who have homes and families, and perhaps a full-time job as well, and who may be relatively remote from centres of population, cannot expect to rely on the traditional lecture and tutorial method of teaching. Thus, in the Open University correspondence teaching is central and over-riding in importance. The main source of individual advice, guidance and constructive criticism for an Open University student on a particular course is his course tutor, who bases his teaching primarily on the student's written work in his 'tutor-marked assignments', and his advice is primarily written advice. This implies that a tutor new to correspondence teaching may need to make a conscious adjustment to his new role: marking a script that is to be returned to a student by post, if it is to be a helpful and constructive process, is not at all the same as marking an examination paper or making notes on an essay that will be discussed in a conventional tutorial.

General principles

What, then is it like to teach at a distance, by correspondence? It is perhaps surprising, though gratifying, at first to realise the depth of involvement that can develop and the sense one has of getting to know the student, at a personal level, through his written work, even when one never sees the student at all. Much depends on previous teaching experience. After that, an ability to put oneself in the student's position and thus assess the relevance and clarity of one's own comments made on the script is the single most important factor. Naturally, the work varies between levels and between faculties. However, what follows will attempt to discuss, with examples, the common features underlying all correspondence teaching work. In the chapter on the tutor-counsellor's role, there is some discussion of the special problems of the foundation year student (page 28), and advice which is course-specific is given in the tutor notes issued by course teams.

In commenting on assignments the tutor (or tutor-counsellor – we shall not distinguish between the two in the correspondence teaching role) must seek

to adapt the course material to individual needs as best he may. By evaluating the work and offering criticism, he may suggest to his student ways in which he might improve. This requires two things from the tutor: the ability to convey, through his comments, advice for further study and the ability to perceive his student's present state of knowledge and conceptual framework so that the advice may be relevant. How this works out in practice may be seen in the following example. A social science tutor had to award an 'F' grade on assignment 1. He wrote the following explanation on the PT3 form (the form accompanying each written assignment, copies of which are kept for reference by the tutor, the student and the University), in the space provided for overall assessment:

> I am sorry that the mark is so disappointing, and I hope I do not seem over-critical. The essay was not a catastrophic fail, but I do not feel that it merits higher than 'F' for the following reasons:
>
> 1 The wording of the question means the main focus must be on the contemporary situation – major portions of your essay were essentially historical.
>
> 2 The concepts I have just outlined need to be matched with relevant evidence – too often your discussion was at too general a level – you could, e.g. have drawn on Sec. 62 and 63 of Unit 3, TV 2 on Ibadan, or several authors in Breese. It is early days yet, and this block and questions were difficult – don't let the failure to hit the target this time worry you unduly.

The key features of this comment are that it is humane, and not destructive of the student's self-esteem, and that it is both constructive and supportive. It also underlines an important restriction placed on tutors by the framework of the Open University. Part-time staff must use, in some manner, the package of written material and broadcasts upon which the University centres its tuition, and in relation to it the responsible tutor must be at once critical and independent, yet knowledgeable and constructive. As in the example quoted, references to Open University course material in a tutor's actual correspondence comments seem an obvious means of helping the student to achieve a similar relationship. This is not, of course, to imply any kind of slavish dependence on the course material any more than on any other book (or on any other experience that one learns from). But specific references to particular passages in the texts should be a valuable and economical way of expanding advice – the student can then follow up the suggestions independently.

In some courses, assignment rubrics and tutor notes have been carefully 'escalated' to suggest a teaching strategy over the year's work – moving from the exercise of minor or basic skills to more sophisticated assignments requiring a more searching analysis and a more comprehensive synthesis of ideas by the student. The conscientious tutor will try to work within any such overall strategy, aiming to develop the individual student's distinctive abilities methodically and cumulatively. There is a tendency towards over-simplification among adult students (and tutors) working under pressure – each assignment or section may be seen in isolation so that the course becomes a mere succession of disconnected 'blocks' lacking any cumulative rhythm or dynamic. Such a danger may be especially real in inter-disciplinary courses and certainly in multi-disciplinary ones. Careful attention to assignment rubrics and tutor notes is likely to be especially important at foundation level when good habits need to be established. The assignment questions and rubrics are the University's main means of helping to develop powers of disciplined thought in its students. Accordingly Open University students have to be led to interpret assignment rubrics with scrupulous fidelity to the intentions behind them. Adult students have ideas of their own which they wish simply to substitute for

those they are asked to consider, but while freshness or independence of mind is vital and not to be discouraged, discipline is also necessary.

A further point that we have already noted in the example of the social science tutor's comment was the manner in which criticism was offered. Much tutorial discussion at university level inevitably involves taking issue with a student's opinions, at times even in a robustly sharp manner. Open University correspondence work, however, may require a rather more circumspect or 'remedial' tutorial tone – 'nursing' the student (good nurses being cheerfully stimulating and sensibly practical rather than 'sympathic' in the sentimental sense). Written comments need to be very carefully phrased and considerate – the opportunity for a hasty aside or added explanation is not available when the student opens the envelope. More important, though, at foundation level a tutor-counsellor may need to be especially concerned not just to strike out errors or to debate with the student but to assist him to develop basic skills and form views that are worthy of debate. At higher levels, the balance may change, though in a multi-disciplinary context one cannot depend upon that.

Course tutors in the Open University system may find it helpful to remember that students taking the course that they tutor may have come from a very different kind of course, or even from a different faculty. Students are sometimes taken aback when the abilities expected of them, and painfully acquired, in one course seem to count for little in a subsequent one. If a student had done well beforehand, a sudden barrage of low grades, however well warranted, may upset him considerably. Indeed, all students given low grades – and certainly all given 'R' and 'F' grades – should be given careful, specific advice by Open University tutors. The temptation to comfort a student with higher grades than are strictly deserved must be denied. In such cases, a telephone call might be invited or a meeting at a tutorial or, at foundation level, a special session for remedial tuition might well be arranged.*

It is essential to do everything to forestall demoralization and consequent 'drop out' in a 'distance teaching' system. To illustrate some of these matters, here is a PT3 comment (accompanying a 'D' grade) that may seem to be on the right lines, though the actual advice could, with advantage, be more specific.

> It's clear that you have spent a lot of time on this, and there are aspects in which it is good, but on the whole I felt that there were one or two areas needing attention. You have not, perhaps made the fullest use of Unit 6. Have another look especially, at Sections 20.4 and 20.5: this was where the crucial material for this assignment was covered.
>
> You write clearly, but not always in complete sentences. It is important to do this: as I've commented on the script, it is not advisable to write in note-form unless specifically asked to do so. Again, your answers, even though brief, needed rather more careful planning. You tend to set down your ideas rather as they occur to you, I think. Your answer to question 5, unfortunately, contained a great deal of material that wasn't really relevant, and you omitted to consider the second part of the question. But don't be disheartened: there's a lot to commend here too.

Thus tutors might take pains to avoid anything like an abrupt or curt style. It is not easy to write short comments that do not seem 'short' in the adverse sense. This is not to advocate unction, but a correspondence tutor has to study how to raise the issues with a largely unknown student on paper while conveying the air of companionable co-operation that is usually shown in a live

*For further information see the *Handbook for the Part-Time Tutorial and Counselling Staff*, Section 6.

tutorial by 'non-verbal gesture'. A correspondence tutor therefore has to acquire the knack of friendly 'verbal gesture'.

Even the new tutor-counsellor (perhaps especially the new tutor-counsellor) should not (and, indeed, cannot) depend on meeting the students to establish good relations. He ought to excel as a correspondence tutor first and foremost.

Admittedly, considered comment takes time to produce and part-time staff do not have excessive time at their disposal, but 'not too little, not too much' is a sensible rule of thumb in correspondence tuition as in other matters. A half dozen points of constructive criticism or positive advice on the PT3 form, related to half a dozen specific comments in the margins of the script itself (together with correction of factual errors) should normally suffice. There is a law of diminishing returns here, in that students may respond more to a few well directed comments than to a large number of miscellaneous suggestions. This may be particularly true of weak students, who, faced with an overdose of criticism and correction, may pursue the less important at the expense of the more important, or even give up altogether in the face of so big a task. Certainly many students at foundation level seem to need to learn how to learn from written comment and may need some coaching in how to do so. But the hard-pressed tutor would also do well to remember that the *good* student deserves stimulus as much as the weaker one needs 'remedial' advice.

Not only should comments be specific to be effective, they must be clearly self-explanatory, even to the point of giving examples of what is meant. The PT3 comment should contain specific references making it concrete and comprehensible. If some of these can refer to points also commented on within the body of the script, so much the better (e.g. 'see your second paragraph, page 3' directs the student firmly and encourages him to follow up advice).

An example of phraseology on a foundation level social science script which reads well and which invites a student to pursue his argument further is:

> Yes . . . though this in turn might reduce productivity, by keeping workers in low productivity jobs. This in turn would reduce wages which in turn . . . ?

Or from a mathematics script:

> It is easier, and more elegant, to start by adding x to both sides of $y > x$. Try it!

Then too, comments should be clear. For example, if a tutor criticises a student on the PT3 form for being 'repetitious', then the repetitive passages should be clearly marked on the script.

Indeed, all comments, particularly the brief ones on the script, need to be self-contained. Many of our students are not versed in academic shorthand or allusiveness, so comments like 'tighten up your structure' or 'See AJPT' may not be intelligible. The following marginal comments made on a social science script are models of their kind. In the second assignment, students were asked to identify three crises alluded to in an article by Dr Schumacher and to write their own definitions of the crises.

TUTOR'S COMMENTS	STUDENT'S SCRIPT
(a) Sources of energy are a particular area of concern. (b) I would have liked you to have gone into more detail on how we have to think again. We must, according to Schumacher, change over to less intensive forms of technology which can utilise replaceable energy sources (e.g. solar energy, wind, water-power).	*We are running out of resources* Land and the world's other natural resources, are being used up at such an increasing rate, that we shall have to 'think again' in order to ensure our future survival, and try to reduce our assets.
Schumacher would, I think say that if we adopted intermediate technology we would be able to stop pollution without putting any great strain on scarce resources. We would work with nature not against her.	*The ecological system can't stand the strain* The world has become so polluted through industrialization that we are endangering the continued existence of plant and animal life (including humans). We should therefore try to reduce this strain by diverting more effort into controlling pollution, etc., even at the risk of using already scarce resources to achieve this end.
I do not think that Schumacher here is referring specifically to the so-called 'population explosion'. Rather he is alluding to the 'human revolt that is spreading across the globe' (previous sentence). Man is unable to control his own social system, which is breaking down into violence. I think Schumacher would blame this inability to control the human system on the size of government, administration, and industry, which are too remote from the people and are therefore unresponsive and are resented. See his comments on the optimum size of a firm on p.27. One aspect of the inability to control his own special environment is the growth of population, but it is only *one* aspect.	*The human system is getting out of hand* The world is becoming so heavily overpopulated that we are in danger of running out of available resources with which to maintain such numbers. We should therefore try to control population increase so as to maintain some sort of balance between the Earth's resources and the population it can sustain.

All comments should be constructive suggestions intended to help the students to improve (we keep saying that the assignment is not some kind of examination where correction and fault finding is the main aim). Much of what has been said almost amounts to saying that the tutor should refrain from commenting unless he can take the opportunity to encourage further thought on the student's part, or unless the short-comings of the work can be noted *together with some indication of how to overcome them* in a way that is relevant to the home-based learner. Ticks and crosses alone are an inadequate form of comment, although they may be less damaging than the merely 'hostile' verbal exclamations sometimes encountered. It is not easy to prescribe rules for achieving the right sort of vein in correspondence tutoring, any more than wider stylistic questions can be easily reduced to a formula. The examples cited perhaps have the right note and further examples will be given later, illustrating other points but equally acceptable in approach.

Particular types of comment

Another difficulty facing the tutor is to decide what kinds of comment are required. We have already noted that too much comment may be counter-productive (see page 10). Monitoring experience suggests, furthermore, that individual tutors do have individual habits – some tend to notice one kind of thing about the student's work, while some notice another. The better tutors are flexible enough to offer students a range of mixed comment according to the particular student's strengths or weaknesses in that particular assignment.

It is admittedly only too easy, working under pressure, to let one's advice congeal into set formulae or stock phrases but any one script may call for several kinds of comment, even if none will call for all the possible kinds. It may help to develop this point if we now list some suggested types of comment, in no particular order of importance: such kinds of comment should connect implicitly with the various kinds of intellectual attainment that the University as a University, seeks to develop in its students. Of course, the different kinds shade off into one another.

(i) *Comments that acknowledge the student's point of view or stage of development* – that convey the tutor's awareness of what the student is 'getting at'. Here, faced with imperfect work, the tutor may have to make a positive act of 'empathy', of openness to clumsy expressions. Only then will comments constitute positive encouragement as distinct from mere exhortation. The tutor should explain as clearly as possible (on the assignment form) exactly why or how the work seems good, as well as not so good. This is not to 'explain the grade' in a direct or narrow (and reductive) way but to make clear to the student the decisive merits and deficiencies of his work, e.g.

> This is an essay in which you have responded very intelligently and very sensitively to the poetic effects of 'Relic' [by Ted Hughes], especially rhythm, alliteration and metaphor. I also admire your intelligent interpretation of the poem's meaning. I thought, however, that you stated this meaning, the poem's wider implications, too soon. I would have preferred your comments about the sea and its relics as an extended metaphor for human behaviour, to have followed, not preceded, your analysis of the stylistic effects. Otherwise, you seem to be imposing an interpretation on the poem instead of arriving at its meaning from analysis of the stylistic effects. You say, for example, that at the end of the first stanza the 'metaphorical meaning' has been forgotten, whereas I would have thought that the irony in the use of 'achievement' prepares the way for the more explicit use of metaphor in the last five lines. In line 8, does the tension really relax when (as you observe) every word, indeed every syllable, is stressed, suggesting the gnawing action?

(ii) *Comments that simply correct errors of fact, or mistakes in syntax and spelling* (in effect the opposite of the preceding category). Correction *has* to be direct and unambiguous, when called for, although the comment on the assignment form might well, in bad cases, soften the blow by putting the dose of plain correction in perspective. Students whose work requires a large degree of such straight correction may well merit an individual tutorial – if only by telephone – to encourage them, and help the tutor to diagnose the root of the problem.

Corrective comment is perhaps more often necessary in science subjects, or in mathematics. However, even here, there is still room for a tentative approach to commenting, since there may be several possible explanations of what went wrong. (A slip? Failure to read the question? Misunderstanding of a basic concept? If so what concept? For there may be more than one conceptual error leading to a particular mistake.) In all subjects, there is scope for more than crossing out the actual mistake: references can be cited: further explanation given, and so on. Some proportion must be kept: one would not advocate the correction of spelling mistakes by an appeal to the history of the language, but any error germane to the subject matter of the course should be treated more fully than by a mere cross or a (triumphant?) 'wrong!' So a science tutor wrote:

> I assume this to be a slip of the pen for *photons*

where a student had put 'electrons' (incorrectly). It may have been a serious

error, in fact; but no harm was done by the tutor's more tentative approach. Here are two similar examples:

Foundation level technology

> Surely there is a feedback loop, since the thermostat compares actual temperatures and desired temperatures, and 'takes' appropriate corrective action?

Second level mathematics

> Although it is obvious, you have not said *why*, in this case, $x = -15$ is not possible. This is a 'hole' in your argument – and it is the sort of thing to watch in this course. In this instance, it is easy to close the gap but . . . !

Sometimes it is not sufficient to note an error or omission, as this second example from mathematics shows

The student wrote

> If the series converges for $z = 0$ then we know $\lim_{n\to\infty} \left|\frac{a_{n+1}}{a_n}\right| < 1.$

This is an invalid conclusion, but a common mistake. If the tutor had just marked it 'wrong', the student would not know why.

He wrote

> No, you don't! This limit may not exist,
> or it may be equal to 1.
> $\lim_{n\to\infty} \left|\frac{u_{n+1}}{u_n}\right| < 1$ implies $\Sigma |u_n|$ converges,
> but the implication does not work the opposite way round.
> You will see this if you try the series with
> $u_n = n^{-2}$.

(iii) Indeed our second category thus shades off into the class of *comments aimed at helping the student to clarify his written expression (and hence thought)*. These may require extremely tactful phrasing, and powers of humility and real sympathy from the tutor – after all, the student's style or method is often the man (or woman). It might conceivably be argued that the tutor's opinion of what constitutes 'good or bad writing' (in an arts or social science essay, say) is the last thing that he should seek to impose upon his students. Clarification of the student's logic or argument may not be separable from clarifying the way a student expresses himself and the former might better be the ostensible centre of attention. Possibly the following comment is too simply dismissive (opinions may legitimately differ about the value of 'jargon'), but clarity must be a virtue which disciplines using continuous prose as a vehicle for thought will want to encourage:

> You hide potentially interesting ideas under an accumulation of polysyllabic near jargon – a great pity. For example: 'psychological issues of assumption', 'intangibles of time period influence', 'alienation', 'disaffection prevalent in times of war', 'close verbal parallelism', 'perspicacious psychosomatic implications', 'allusive nomenclatural sexual symbolism'– and many more. This can only confuse the point, I fear, and yet beneath this you write well, if unevenly and with weak organization. You need clarity of expression to project interesting points to full effect.

(iv) *Comments that guide students towards the proper use of evidence* – comments that explain and illustrate the notion of *relevance* come under this category. The good habit of always giving examples, illustrations or passages of specific analysis backing up one's argument has to be carefully inculcated. All students need to learn how to be 'objective' – to obtain appropriate data, assess its value and incorporate it in an argued essay e.g.

> Although you examine some of the language quite imaginatively, you have a tendency to explain the effects by giving your own mental pictures which are sometimes not very closely related to what the poet is saying. Thus you remark on the 'gleam' of cats on 'black tiles' in 'owlish moons' and obviously respond to at least part of the emotion conveyed at this point but fail to remark that this particular passage deals with the cats' sexuality – nor are 'black' tiles mentioned.

Experience suggests that students (not only at foundation level) find 'relevance' a difficult principle to grasp. Nor are tutors necessarily infallible judges of what is or is not relevant. Sometimes it may be that the untrained adult student has not explicitly pointed out the relevance of material that is potentially so. Tutors may need to be aware of dismissing unfamiliar notions merely because they have been clumsily or abruptly introduced.

(v) *Comments that criticise and amend the assignment as a whole.* As well as comments which deal with errors of detail or fact, the student will need comments which deal with his approach to the assignment as a whole. It may be lacking in coherence, or the whole essay or answer may not be relevant. This last point is quite important: students often fail to realize exactly what is required of them, and produce poorer work than they might otherwise do. In mathematics, for instance, many students produce too much proof rather than too little, though this is easily dealt with. In all disciplines, students may make the opposite mistake and interpret the scope of an essay question too narrowly. Even if the essay question is well written within these limits, it would normally attract a low grade; but some recognition needs to be given that the low grade stems from a single error, and some advice needs to be given to help the student realise why he should have treated the topic more broadly and how he could have deduced this from the course materials and conventions of the disciplines.

These matters are linked to the question of what is required in a good answer. There are conventions underlying assignment or, indeed, examination questions which are very important, for all that they are seldom discussed, and they have to be learned by each student. These conventions govern such things as amount of detail expected, level of argument or proof, and perhaps most important, what the *student* may assume of the reader of his work.

For example, a science tutor wrote on a poor assignment (bare pass, with some very weak answers)

> You have put much effort into this assignment and your answers to questions, 2, 3 and 4 demonstrate that you appreciate many of the general features of bonding and chemical equilibria. But you preferred to discuss these subjects in general terms rather than in connection with *specific* examples. Don't assume that such (fundamental) points are obvious when the question is designed to test your understanding of the subject.

He went on to praise some good points of the work. Notice too how the tutor draws attention to major weaknesses (lack of specificity, omission of fundamental points) in a way which leaves the student some self-esteem.

Not all tutors would agree that to give the 'skeleton' of a better answer, an embryo model solution, is the best way to help a student. Yet failure to analyse the essay topic and the relevant course material sufficiently, and the consequent adoption of a vague or faulty framework for the essay, will have proved a severe handicap. A student may well need help in learning how to tackle this preliminary stage of the assignment and so it may be useful if the tutor can suggest an improved essay outline related to the student's own attempt, as in the following example. Of course, it must be acknowledged that to make frequent use of this mode of comment would make large demands on the tutor's time:

> I see a progression in your essay from the instrument to the music. You will have been inundated with hints that the inter-connections between the two are the central issue of the course. So why not plan accordingly? Say:
>
> 1 *Bach and tradition*
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | (i) | the instrument: | pedals
polyphonic clarity, etc. |
> | (ii) | the composers: | the long, N. German-type fugue subjects (à la Buxtehude) in his early works, etc. |
> | (iii) | the church: | how much of his work is liturgically based?
(See e.g. p.96 for pure statistics, etc.) |
>
> 2 *Bach versus tradition*
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | (i) | the instrument: | ? – it seems he was very traditional and specifically towards certain instruments. |
> | (ii) | the composers: | French and Italian influence, etc. |
> | (iii) | the church: | you've covered this well. |

Other aspects of 'structure' also need attention – non sequiturs, repetition, mingling points best kept distinct, etc. Specific comments or 'signposts' on the scripts should direct students towards recognising the clearer (or more interestingly varied) route that their essay might have taken. How to *prove* a point, or establish a position, as distinct from merely asserting it, is an ability that does not come readily. Even in mathematics where proof is often of the essence, students still need guidance on how to set out their arguments.

(vi) *Comments that suggest fresh ideas, new examples, different opinions,* that may not have occurred to the student. A certain amount of this is indispensible by way of stimulus, especially to the good student. But a tutor may have to take care that he does not overwhelm a student (especially one new to academic study) and does not make *all* his comments of this kind. If future reading is suggested (over and above the set course material) the tutor's references should be thoroughly specific (giving the exact pages, or chapters), and realistic (in books that the student with access only to municipal libraries may be expected to obtain fairly easily). Above all, any inclination simply to *disagree* with the student should be avoided lest it becomes a set attitude – no student likes to be made to feel an Aunt Sally! Here is an example of a comment tactfully suggesting points that the tutor thinks the student has missed – yet the tutor leaves room for the student to reject the suggestions, to feel involved in a 'dialogue' and reply (in the mind's ear, so to speak) 'no I wouldn't exactly' or 'yes, but on the other hand':

> This is excellent as far as you go. But I feel there were one or two further points to notice. A general point about the meaning of the poem: wouldn't you say that the poet is drawing some sort of comparison between the behaviour of sea-creatures and human behaviour? i.e. this isn't just a poem about the ruthlessness of 'nature'. Why, otherwise, the remarks that 'camaraderie does not hold'

and 'none grow rich' in the sea, for instance? Perhaps you felt this was self-evident? But I feel it needed drawing out and discussing. You make no comment either on the break in the poem. Is there any difference in tone between the two parts? What's the purpose of this diversion? Perhaps certain lines – e.g. line 8 – could have done with more detailed analysis. Exactly how does such a line achieve its undoubted power or impact?

(vii) *Comments that explain the grade* need not do so too explicitly or laboriously. But the tutor may need to indicate, on the assignment form, just what his assessment of the script's quality is (an assessment which the grade symbolises, more or less crudely). In a positive way, the tutor should convey a definite sense of the relevant academic standards – 'I think you fall short here because . . . This is good because you do X . . . but you don't do Y. . . '. Such comment should explain the grade implicitly. Here is a comment that gives 'real reasons' for the grade:

I don't feel that this is quite up to the standard of your best work, though I've given you a B grade for it – I feel in standard it comes somewhere between a high C and a low B. You have certainly grasped the distinction between the nightmarish unreality of the situation, and the 'authentic', manner and style, and I like the way you refer to the symbolism of Gregor's 'nagging wound'. I'd have liked more of this sort of detailed consideration of the implications of parts of this text, and I think you might have followed up your remarks on Kafka's style with a detailed analysis of an example or two. But you're certainly on the right lines – a very sound answer.

(viii) *Comments that connect up with earlier work or anticipate later problems.* One great merit of written correspondence tuition is that it builds up a permanent record, something that the student can think twice about, revaluing his progress from time to time. Tutors might make the most of this, structuring their tutorial comment over the year, and bearing in mind that its cumulative effect may be particularly valuable when the student revises for the end of year examination.

Comments that relate not only to the particular assignment but also 'look before and after' encourage the student to do likewise. If, as mentioned earlier, the course itself has an overall strategy explained in assignment rubrics and tutor notes then advice of this sort should be possible and productive. Here is a very simple example on a student's first assignment:

You have tackled a difficult question well. But although many of the individual points you make are in tune with your sound conclusions, I don't feel that you've organized your material into a structured argument. Even such a brief, generalized scheme as I suggest on your script (back page) can be an invaluable guide while you write; I have also added some hints about the language itself. You have the *information* firmly in your grasp – now try, with TMA 02, to concentrate on how it is best communicated.

This eighth category may lead tutors to think of ways in which their students may be encouraged to make use of the comments that they take the time and trouble to write.

There is an illuminating discussion of the manner in which students in arts in one region used their tutors' comments.* It is worth quoting from Mackenzie's conclusion:

*Mackenzie, K. (1976) 'Student Reactions to Tutor Comments on the Tutor Marked Assignment (the TMA)', *Teaching at a Distance* No. 5.

It does not seem that most correspondence tuition must at present be (why not?) an act of faith. Much remains to be known, in any detail, about the average student's use of his tutor's comments. Much may yet be done, by all staff, to guide and encourage students in productive ways of learning from the marked TMA. One thing stands out, that almost all students value the TMA as a means of learning, and that any resources directed by the University towards improving its efficiency will therefore be well invested.

TUTORIAL TEACHING

Tutorial in a study centre

We have seen that correspondence marking is the chief method by which a tutor teaches his students. But most courses offer a limited number of face-to-face tutorials which course tutors have to plan and give. It must be realised that face-to-face tuition within the Open University does not try to assume the function it has in most colleges, polytechnics and universities, where it is of prime importance. In the conventional teaching system, face-to-face tuition embraces both lecture (formal dissemination of information) and tutorials (opportunities for educative dialogue). In the Open University the former is executed through the medium of course units and broadcasts, and the latter for the most part through correspondence tuition.

The class tutorial in the Open University does have an important, if restricted part to play in the teaching system. Its original intention was that it should be remedial and supportive in nature. The main role of the tutor here is not to develop new themes and ideas, but to ensure that students understand the

ideas and arguments in the course units and broadcasts, and to remedy students' academic weaknesses. This sounds a very narrow brief: many tutors and students believe strongly in the value of tutorials and one of the commonly heard questions is: why doesn't the Open University provide more opportunities for face-to-face contact? But there are some general points which the Open University tutor must bear in mind. Many students have so little spare time that they cannot afford to travel to a study centre even for a 'good' tutorial, because they feel the time spent on travelling and on the tutorial itself is better spent on the course materials. Some students are deterred by expense while others are kept at home by family responsibilities or physical handicaps. This is summed up by a D101 student*:

> It was a waste of time coming – it took an hour to get in and an hour to get back, I spent two hours there, turned to page x, looked for answers to these questions. Honestly, I'd rather put in four hours' serious study at home . . . I wanted it really to be just a correspondence course. I'd find it binding to *have* to go every week.

So it is clear that one cannot expect even the majority of one's group to attend tutorials. Moreover, it is clear that while class tutorials need not be narrowly 'remedial', they are most likely to fill a definite need if they are distinctly different from a lecture, which could after all be broadcast or read. The essential feature of a face-to-face meeting is that the students can participate; perhaps it is not too much to say that if students are not active in the class, the tutor should ask himself what is the point of the meeting.

Of course, students may expect to be allowed to sit and listen while the tutor does the work, and they may even say that they expect to be 'taught'. Even arts students, at day schools, have been known to clamour for lectures, and to dismiss any idea of 'hearing each other talk'. Once a class has begun to think in this way (because only the more passive students are still attending?) it can be tempting to take the line of least resistance, but observations of class tutorials suggest that this is not the best solution. The alternative of stimulating the class to think in a new way about a few topics related to the units is likely to be much more profitable, and perhaps more true to the ideal of university education.

TUTORIAL PLANNING

To turn to some more practical matters of tutorial planning, it is useful to consider some teaching activities. The types considered are distinguished tentatively for simplicity in discussion; in practice the distinctions are fluid. In conventional contexts, the tutor's work involves one or more of the following:**

1 Explaining concepts
2 Demonstrating skills and techniques
3 Generating discussion, suggesting activities, or setting problems for the students to tackle

*Durbridge, N. A Brief Survey of Current Course Team Policies on Tutorial Provision, Institute of Educational Technology paper (quoted verbatim).

**Mason, J. H. Teaching at the Open University – what we do and what we've learned. To appear in *Teaching/Learning Process Seminars II* (1977) edited by Igor and Kususzyn, Development of Teaching Skills Program, Counselling and Development Center, York University, Toronto (an interesting analysis of tutor-student inter-action).

4 Diagnosing difficulties and misconceptions, and suggesting remedies

5 Advising on a programme of study

6 Assessing overall progress and supplying motivation and encouragement

To these may be added:

7 Advising on study methods.

In the Open University, some of these are more or less completely taken over by the course material, so that the tutor's task is lightened somewhat to providing a secondary or 'back up' resource, particularly in areas 1 and 3, which are extensively covered by the course materials. (It is in this sense, we suggest, that Open University tutorials are 'remedial' – a fact sometimes disputed but which seems indisputable if one interprets it as meaning starting where the course material leaves off.)* In addition 6 is commonly thought to be the role of the counsellor, though this role is merged with that of the tutor at foundation level, and is discussed more fully later.

In this framework, the tutor's approach can take various forms:

A Didactic (pure lecture or demonstration)

B Socratic (compelling student participation by direct questioning)

C Non-directive (e.g. acting by simply asking 'Are there any questions?')

D Organizational (structuring student activity without participating in it)

While all these approaches to, or styles of, teaching can be used with all the types of work listed, some seem to be much more appropriate than others in the Open University, at least in their pure form. We have already suggested that the 'didactic' method is seldom of use; the 'non-directive' method seems to be always unsuccessful, to judge by staff tutors' experience, unless the course is one which specifically directs the student to ask for advice (as on a project course – see Chapter 4, page 40). In practice, most tutors seem to find that the 'Socratic' method is the most effective. Even in technical subjects like the natural sciences, questions which reveal what students understand, as well as what they do not understand, help to build up confidence and establish a good relationship between a tutor and his class. It must, however, be admitted that this method can be very taxing for all concerned, and it is not always possible to cover more than a few points, so tutors in practice feel under pressure to 'cover the units' more fully, while still asking questions at important points. The danger is that students often regard the tutor as the 'expert', they must be enabled to see that in the long run it is not on the tutor but on themselves and on the books and other materials that they must rely.

In summary, then, the class tutorial should be a participatory event where the tutor does not so much lecture his class as elicit a response from them in reply to a few well chosen questions or problems. The most successful tutorials appear to be discussions, in which the tutor unobtrusively steers the discussion or occasionally contributes a crucial point, or (in courses where skills have to be learned) collective problem-solving sessions where, carefully structured problems are worked through by the class, a little at a time, prompted by well chosen questions or hints from the tutor. It must not be assumed, however, that tutorial occasions like these can be run successfully without careful planning: finding the right discussion topics and the right problems can be extraordinarily difficult. For this reason, many tutors value opportunities for

*See for example Woolfe, R. and Murgatroyd, S. (1976) 'What is the function of tutorials?' *Teaching at a Distance* No. 6.

meeting other tutors on the same course to discuss these and other matters.

USE OF BROADCASTS

Students listening to a radio broadcast at a study centre

The broadcasts form a vital component of the teaching materials provided for Open University students. Increasingly, as the pattern of student performance becomes clearer, they are being more effectively integrated into the rest of the materials, and on some courses, such as the new mathematics foundation course, M101, they provide the only place where a particular topic is taught. To assist students to make effective use of broadcasts, tutors might consider

arranging for their group as a whole to listen or watch, at home or at the study centre, and then to compare notes. (For some courses audio visual cassettes are available, and all radio broadcasts can be provided, on loan, recorded on tape cassettes.) This note-taking can of itself be a useful skill for students to acquire, and the notes can be used as a point of departure for tutorial classes.

It may be that students do not obtain the maximum benefit from broadcasts at present. Research* tends to show that the more successful students watch broadcasts more consistently, though there is no clear pattern of cause and effect. It seems very probable that some students on each course value broadcasts highly, while others do not. (In the same way, perhaps, some students value tutorials, while others do not.) This may reflect a genuine difference between the preferred learning patterns of students, but it is also possible, or even probable, that more students could benefit from broadcasts if they were given more help to do so. It may be the case that broadcasts encountered resistance, from both students and tutors, because of the tendency to judge them solely on aesthetic criteria. If so, tutors can play a very useful part in encouraging the use of different criteria in judging programmes and in developing more positive attitudes to the broadcasts by making more use of them in their tutorials.

We shall not discuss regional day schools at length here, although some course teams lay down a programme of day schools. In some cases, when held at a major population centre, they offer a better use of restricted tutorial time for groups of students who live some distance from their tutor. Such day schools may offer a most fertile 'mix' of lectures, seminars, films and special exercises where the effect of the whole is more than the sum of its parts. For courses without summer schools, well planned and integrated day schools may be invaluable, and tutors should plan them carefully in consultation with their regional staff tutor.

Finally, what may one say about classroom manner? At the risk of labouring the obvious, it is important to point out that the tutor must avoid embarrassing the shy or less able student, some of whom hesitate to expose their (real or imaginary) weaknesses to their fellow students' scrutiny. It is easy for a tutor to appear very discouraging when a student makes a contribution that is not relevant or wrong; but ignoring contributions or dismissing them abruptly soon reduces the number of good contributions as well as the bad! Indeed, this aspect of tutoring needs careful cultivation: if one catches oneself being dismissive of a student's suggestion, it is often a good idea to apologise, to try to let him down lightly. According to Gibbs and Durbridge**, the characteristics most often mentioned by staff tutors in discussion of Open University tutors' work were warmth and understanding. One assumes that competence in the subject was taken for granted, but even so it is a telling comment on the importance of a tutor's personality.

*Bates, A. Survey of student use of broadcasting, *Teaching at a Distance* No. 5, 1976.

**Gibbs, G. and Durbridge, N. (1976) 'Characteristics of Open University Tutors, Part 1', *Teaching at a Distance* No. 6; (1976) Part 2, *Teaching at a Distance* No. 7.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY

The rapid expansion of higher education both in developed and developing nations in recent years has seen a similar expansion in activities which come within the general heading of 'counselling services'. The range of duties under this general heading are so large that no single individual can be expected to encompass them. In some institutions counsellors may provide information on routine administrative functions; in others they may offer psychological and medical advice. The practitioners may range from teachers with additional responsibilities to professional therapists and members of the medical profession. The reasons for such variety appear to lie in the variety of higher education itself. The increased expectation for and involvement in higher education by students from a broader social spectrum has meant a substantial increase in the volume of higher education. Increases in scale have brought with them changes in the relationship between student and teacher. The teacher has become more remote and, as far as the student is concerned, appears to have retreated into the monolithic structure of the institution. It is in this gap between teacher, or institution, and student that the counselling services have developed and, just as institutions have developed along a variety of lines so have the counselling functions, catering for the discerned needs of students in their particular learning situation. Counselling in the Open University is distinctive to the institution. Its origins lie in the Report of the Planning Committee:

> Because of the range of choices inherent in the degree pattern, 'the openness' of the University, and the possibility that many students may wish to enrol who are not at a stage when they could profitably pursue degree studies, we consider the development of the counselling service to be of particular importance. It will . . . be the means by which the University can reduce to a minimum the number of students who embark upon courses only to find that they cannot continue with them.*

Within the space of a few short years the initial model of counselling provision has undergone a fairly radical change. Yet its aims and its importance in the Open University context remain as vital as ever.

Continuity of concern

By linking each undergraduate student at foundation level to a tutor-counsellor and by continuing this association beyond foundation level wherever possible the Open University has sought to meet a discerned need. It seeks to provide a continuous educational support which cuts across disciplines and across faculties. The frequent contact, whether by face-to-face or other methods, the subject link which is reinforced through the correspondence element and the provision of sympathetic help in planning a beneficial work pattern, all these generate a sound basis of mutual understanding between students and tutor-counsellors at foundation level which students may rely on throughout their later studies. It is this relationship which breaks down the isolation of the home-based student and begins to encourage and shape the effective dialogue which is the basis of education. There has always been a perspective which regards

*The Open University Planning Committee (1969) *Report of the Planning Committee to the Secretary of State for Education and Science*, HMSO, paragraph 51.

education as personal development rather than helping people to memorise information. The continuity of contact and concern which is the basis of the relationship between a tutor-counsellor and a student facilitates this personal development.

Support for associate students

The system of continuity of concern on the part of a tutor-counsellor for individual students from foundation level to course completion is, of course, particularly important for undergraduate students. Associate students enter the University for a period of study which is of shorter duration than a degree. Often, however, such students remain with the University for longer than a year taking two or more courses which may or may not be recognised in themselves as a specific qualification. For them the same principles hold good, namely local support of a general academic nature and normally more distant support from a course tutor relating to the specific academic content of the course. However, because their registration as students is normally of a more transient nature, it is not always possible to establish the same relationship at a local level as for undergraduates. The University's response to the varying needs of associate students is to tailor support systems to the particular needs of associate students. Equality of consideration rather than equality of provision is the aim here.

Complexity and flexibility

The Open University student probably has more freedom and more choice in his degree profile than any other student. This freedom, however, in turn demands of the individual student a number of important decisions. It is an interesting and sometimes infuriating paradox that this provision of flexibility to cater for individual needs tends to result in complicated administrative procedures which may in themselves present the student with problems. The tutor-counsellor must be able to help each student administratively, academically and vocationally. He must interpret and resolve with the student any divergence between the objectives of the course and any preconceptions with which the student might approach his work. But he must not merely deal with the various problems as they arise. He is not the *deus ex machina* of the crisis but rather a supportive and knowledgeable adviser who is closely involved with every aspect of his students' studies.

Personal relationship

As we have seen from pages 2 and 3 the students in any one tutor-counsellor's group can be and are likely to be diverse in their backgrounds; but they all have in common the fact that, as part-time students they can suffer from feeling isolated and are working within a very complex organisation which might tend to increase that isolation. The tutor-counsellor can best make his advice, knowledge and support available, if he develops a personal relationship with each one of them. Early individual contact with new students is clearly important for the establishment of this personal relationship. It is, however, difficult to say much about this in a general way, as so much depends on an individual's approach*, but aspects are discussed throughout this booklet and in the *Handbook for Part-Time Tutorial and Counselling Staff*. Certainly a trusting and friendly relationship can be established only if the tutor-counsellor is in regular contact with his students. With many students particularly in their foundation year, this contact occurs at meetings at the local study centre;

*See in particular Thomas, A. B. (1974) 'Success and failure in Open University counselling', *Teaching at a Distance* No. 1, and Cook, R. (1977) 'Counselling continuity and the committed tutor-counsellor', *Teaching at a Distance* No. 9.

but such meetings are not an essential requisite for success; much counselling work may be carried out by correspondence and telephone, especially in the case of higher level students. Tutor-counsellors, like course tutors, can develop a good relationship with students whom they seldom or perhaps never see.

Independent learners

Tutor-counsellors will do a lot to help the work of course tutors in later years, if they can ensure that their students understand the division of the tutorial function within the Open University among tutor-counsellors, course tutors and the course teams – a division which does not match the teaching patterns in conventional institutions of higher education. Students need to appreciate that learning within the Open University is essentially an active, not a passive process; they have to try to create a relationship of interdependence with their fellow students wherever possible and they have to do as much as they can themselves to benefit from the correspondence teaching of the tutor-counsellor or course tutor. Tutor-counsellors can help their students to become inter-dependent; they can also help their students to become independent but not isolated learners – by helping them to make full use of all that the University offers. How can this be achieved? Perhaps we should begin by describing what tutor-counsellors try to do for all their students and then, in more detail, how they help foundation course students and post-foundation students.

Key points in the year

These are set out in the following table:

The Open University Year	
January	Registration of continuing undergraduate students
February	Courses begin
April	Final registration of new undergraduate students
May to September	Choice of courses for the following year
July – August	Summer schools
October – November	Examinations
November	Allocation of courses to new students

The Open University year has an established pattern. The outline given above shows the basis of the programme which tutor-counsellors make for the whole year. Such a programme is essential in order, as far as possible, to anticipate the needs of students at all levels and to plan to contact them at these key points in the year. Tutor-counsellors can invite and encourage individual students to discuss their overall progress, to talk about areas of increasing interest derived from their current studies and to voice their expectations, attitudes or apprehensions about various elements of their university work. In addition, many of the best ways tutor-counsellors have of getting to know their students well are informal: a student comes of his own accord to talk over a matter personally; the tutor-counsellor gives a student a lift home, or vice-versa; the group adjourns to a nearby pub after an evening session.

Individual help and advice

There is a whole range of activity, some of it of a general administrative nature but all of it concerned with the educational progress of the individual, where students need and welcome advice. This includes:

applications for credit exemptions;
payment of course fees and application for help from the Financial Assistance Fund;
submission of information affecting progress during the year;
choice of summer school venue and dates;
decision to apply for summer school excusal;
conditional registration for courses in the following year;
withdrawal;
examinations;
honours degree requirements;
problems over the non-return of assignments;
difficulties in obtaining set books or in seeing or listening to broadcasts;
late submission of assignments;
appeal against grades;
disabled students' needs;
study centre facilities.

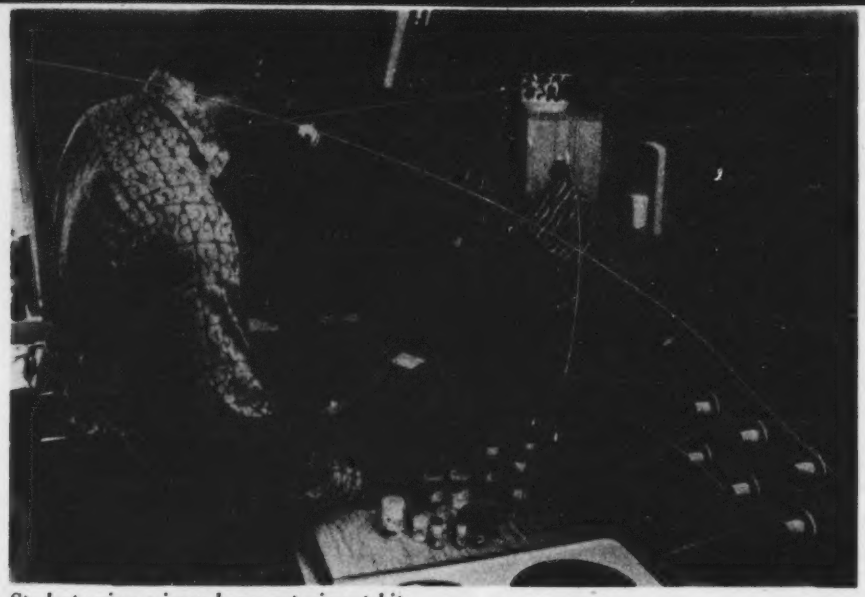
This list is by no means exhaustive; it serves only to give an idea of the range of tasks. In all this tutor-counsellors have to interpret the Open University system for individual students so that their academic work can continue with the minimum of disruption.

Tutor-counsellors can of course hope to train their students in their foundation year to deal with minor administrative difficulties, such as course materials going astray, on their own initiative. However, the results of such administrative problems can severely affect the educational progress of students and, although tutor-counsellors can make sure that students contact the appropriate department at Walton Hall, they must be ready to advise students on how to overcome immediate difficulties. Supposing, for instance, that:

> A science student does not receive his home experiment kit at the same time as other students in the group. The student may write to the Home Kits Warehouse and the tutor-counsellor may contact the Senior Counsellor after checking that the student has submitted an indemnity form. However, the student may need to start the first experiment in order to understand the course material and complete the first assignment. The tutor-counsellor in this case, through his knowledge of the course and contact with other students should be able to arrange for the equipment necessary for the first experiment to be lent by another student, or to make some alternative arrangements through the Regional Office.

The numerous quasi-administrative jobs which tutor-counsellors have to do will not be discussed in detail here, although this should not be taken to mean that they are unimportant – and they can take up a lot of time. It is of more importance to note that they are in reality often not purely administrative matters but are very commonly intertwined with more complex educational problems. An example might make this clear:

> A student writes to her tutor-counsellor to say that she will have to withdraw from her foundation course as she cannot manage to pay her final registration fee. The tutor-counsellor writes to remind her that she can apply for a grant



Student using science home experiment kit

from the Financial Hardship Fund and asks the student to come to discuss this at the study centre. She has not attended sessions and has sent in only one assignment. She accepts the invitation to discuss the matter of fees. It emerges that there is not a serious financial difficulty, although the student is entitled to apply for help. Her main concern is about her ability to cope with the course. The tutor-counsellor discusses her work with her in detail, is able to assure her that she is likely to be a quite competent student, agrees to accept the second assignment late, and the student decides to continue with the course. He also explains that if she withdraws from the course before final registration she will have to re-apply as a new applicant, with no guarantee of a place for the following year.

Records and knowledge of student progress

Another major responsibility for tutor-counsellors is to keep up-to-date records of the progress of all their students. To help them to do this they are sent a regular computer print-out showing the performance of their students in their assignments and indicating whether they have fulfilled certain administrative requirements. For students for whom they are not also the tutor they receive a copy of each assignment form with the tutor's summary comments to the student. They also receive records kept by a previous tutor-counsellor, if a student transfers to their group. By maintaining and checking these records regularly tutor-counsellors are able to learn something about all their students – whether they are reaching the necessary level in their assignment work and whether they are doing the number of assignments needed in order to enable them to get a pass on continuous assessment. They should, therefore, be able to identify potential difficulties before these become severe or insuperable. Written records of students' administrative, academic and personal difficulties, in addition to performance on assignments are also made by tutor-counsellors. These are particularly useful if a student transfers to another study centre or region.

Initiating contact

The basis of the yearly programme outlined above includes opportunities for all students to contact their tutor-counsellors at one or more of these key points. However, some students may not do so, and in some cases tutor-counsellors should take the initiative when their information (or lack of it)

suggests that all is not well. Late or non-submission of assignments, together with poor grades can indicate that a student is in difficulty.

> A computer print-out shows that a student, Mr. B., who has registered for three half credit courses, has received one grade D for an assignment for one course and has submitted no assignments for the other two. His tutor-counsellor writes to point out that two assignments are overdue and to ask whether the student needs his help, for example, by authorization of a late assignment. Mr. B. replies that he had registed for three courses in the hope of completing his degree programme that year, but he has recently changed his job and has greatly increased responsibilites at work. He now welcomes the chance to discuss his situation and would like advice as to whether he should withdraw from at least one of his courses.

Choice of courses

Tutor-counsellors are responsible for helping their students, during the annual period of conditional registration in May, to make carefully considered decisions as to their future course choice.* As a tutor-counsellor cannot be familiar with the academic content of more than a handful of courses, co-operation at the time of course choice between tutor-counsellors, tutors and students at all levels and full-time regional staff is of particular importance. Some study centres hold 'conditional registration evenings' during the registration period and at these students can examine a wide range of course material and seek advice from a number of sources including fellow students.

At the same time it is useful to help individual students to review their progress so far and consider carefully their overall academic and personal goals. Group or individual sessions on the career implications of studying with the Open University can be initiated by the tutor-counsellor, who, although not expected to be a vocational guidance expert, can encourage students to talk about their ambitions and so help to clarify their thoughts about ways of achieving them. Booklets on career opportunities, written for adults who are considering a change of occupation, offer a background for this kind of discussion, and these can be made available from regional offices. Normally regional offices will keep tutor-counsellors informed of developments and publications in this area. Where students need advice, such as information on job vacancies or detailed information on other educational opportunities, they should be referred to professional vocational guidance agencies.

Counselling in the Open University is thus concerned with the students' educational progress and is at the centre of the teaching and learning process, not separated from it as a kind of long stop to help the student if all else has failed. Tutor-counsellors are not expected to be part-time psychotherapists or vocational guidance experts, but should be in a position to help students as far as possible and refer them to specialists where necessary. When there is continuity of concern and continuity of contact between tutor-counsellors and their students from their foundation year onwards, it becomes possible to minimize the effects of anything which could hinder the students' educational progress and to take positive steps to advance this progress.

This brief account of the tutor-counsellor's work has been concerned with aspects of the work with students at all levels. However, the work in relation to

*Detailed information on courses is provided in the *Courses Handbook* and its *Supplements*. Practical advice on how to help students at this time is given in the *Handbook for Part-Time Tutorial and Counselling Staff*. The University is also developing an *Interest/Course Index* which lists a wide variety of areas of interest.

foundation course students and students at higher levels does differ and will be discussed separately in more detail.

FOUNDATION LEVEL STUDENTS

Advisory Service for Applicants

When prospective students have applied for admission, the University's Advisory Service for Applicants, manned for the most part by tutor-counsellors, offers advice and help. The operation of the advisory service varies from region to region, but all applicants are offered advice in one form or another. Some are specifically invited to advisory sessions according to criteria relating to potential study difficulties, such as lack of preparedness for study, inability to attend a study centre, or disability, if these are mentioned on the application form. This kind of initiative, seeking to provide help and advice when potential difficulties have been diagnosed, is central to the University's idea of counselling as an active service, using the skill and experience of full and part-time staff to reach out to applicants and students rather than waiting for them to come along with 'problems'.

Individual support

Not all tutor-counsellors are involved in work as advisers to applicants and it is when students are first allocated to them that the tutor-counsellors' major responsibility begins. Regional offices provide information which can help tutor-counsellors to prepare for their first contact with their new students. This information comes from two main sources: the students' application forms and, where students have received advice as applicants, the reports of the applicants' adviser, which may alert tutor-counsellors to particular problems that could arise during the year. This basic information normally reaches tutor-counsellors well before the beginning of the year in which the courses start. From this point it is possible to begin to get to know the students personally.

The students in a tutor-counsellor's group may come from a wide variety of academic and social backgrounds. As the probable needs and capabilities of each individual student are assessed, it becomes evident that some may need more individual time and attention than others. For this reason the University asks tutor-counsellors to give additional support to those who need it most and to use, at their own discretion, the limited amount of time available for special extra sessions. Help can be given to individuals or to small groups before the teaching programme starts, or may be given later in the academic year if a serious need arises. Further extra sessions need authorization from the regional office.

Some examples of the kind of help which can be given follow. It must be noted, however, that such support need not be confined to students whose academic background seems likely to prove inadequate. Special support may also be offered to potentially outstanding students who appear not to be realizing their potential to the full.

1 An S100 tutor-counsellor finds as a result of correspondence with his new students and discussion at an induction meeting that, though the majority seem fairly confident about their use of mathematical skills, there is a small group who lack both confidence and an adequate background in mathematics. He arranges a special session with this small group.

2 A tutor-counsellor receives a report of an interview with an applicant who is now one of his students. The student is disabled, confined to a wheel chair, and will find attendance at a study centre difficult, but also has little

experience of formal academic study. He may well have difficulty, both in acquiring the necessary study skills and with the academic content of the course. The tutor-counsellor arranges to visit the student at home. He finds that the student has no physical difficulties in writing. He has not yet, however, taken the advice given at his interview to do some preparatory work. In discussion the tutor-counsellor diagnoses the student's needs more exactly, gives advice on methods of study and a specific short-term programme of work and arranges to keep regularly in touch with the student by telephone and to put the student in touch with others who live nearby.

3 A group of students accepts the suggestion made by their tutor-counsellor that they should practise study skills, particularly in essay writing. The tutor-counsellor asks them to write an essay on a subject related to early course material and arranges a special session in January at which the essays, which the students have written, are discussed.

Induction meetings

The first chance which tutor-counsellors have to meet many of their students is at an induction meeting, usually arranged before the start of the academic year. This meeting gives them and their students the opportunity to get to know each other as members of a group. The tutor-counsellor has probably begun the immediate task of getting to know each student, by sending a warm and friendly invitation to students to come to meet him and other students at the induction meeting; this is in addition to any formal invitation which may be sent out by the regional office. Many students are quite nervous at this meeting, and a friendly and informal atmosphere helps them greatly. It may even be necessary in some study centres to re-arrange the furniture in order to avoid any suggestion of a classroom session.* In a face-to-face group every member's name can be made known easily and everyone should have a chance to speak.

Forming groups One of the skills needed for the dual role of tutor and counsellor is that of getting students to work well together in groups and the induction meeting offers the first chance of beginning to establish such a group identity. Careful work is then needed for a period of weeks, or longer, to establish a group with a regular and coherent function. The day and purpose of the next meeting should be clearly known to all and reinforced in some cases by a letter or telephone call. Students who did not come to the first meeting, for example, need to be told about the next one and reminded again, if they fail to respond. Many tutor-counsellors give or send their students a programme of their sessions for the early months of the year. Experience has shown that efforts of this kind are normally both necessary and rewarding in establishing a group of new students and developing a sense of mutual help and encouragement.

Contacting students A regular pattern of attendance soon emerges and tutor-counsellors will, of course, be able to get to know well those students who come to the study centre fairly frequently. But it is now a familiar fact that there are many students, sometimes very capable ones, who make very little use of the study centre and with whom tutor-counsellors find it much harder to establish contact. In such cases it is up to the tutor-counsellor to make as many attempts to get in touch with the student as seem appropriate; how and to what extent must be matters for his own judgement. There may even be no communication from the student until the first assignment is sent. One of the most frustrating and intractable problems is that of the student who does not respond to attempts at contact, does not submit the first assignment and drops out of the system. The tutor-counsellor should try to let absentees know the programme in the

*See in particular Murgatroyd, S. (1976) 'Counselling in continuing education', *Teaching at a Distance*, No. 6.

early weeks of the year; if this has already been sent it may have got lost in the post.

The teaching system

From the induction meeting onwards tutor-counsellors can begin one of the most important tasks arising at the beginning of the year, that of explaining the part played by the different elements in the University's teaching and learning system. It is necessary to show students how to benefit from broadcasts, course units, set books, home experiments, study centre sessions and from writing assignments, and also to make sure that students are aware of the equipment which is available in the study centre, the arrangements for the use of the library, computer terminal, any private study facilities and refreshments. In addition students can be encouraged to support the local study centre committee or Students' Association branch committee.

Apart from the novelty of the system and the introduction of new students to it tutor-counsellors have the task of striking a balance between helping students to achieve the more immediate goals in their course and helping them both to complete the foundation course and to prepare for higher level studies for which they need to develop skills as independent learners. This needs a long-term plan or strategy for the whole of the first year and possibly beyond which can be followed with a group of students and with individuals. This longer-term strategy was discussed in the chapter dealing with the work of the course tutor, and is particularly important to students in their first year. Students, on the other hand, understandably will tend to have their immediate goals foremost in mind – the completion of an assignment, understanding a section of a course unit or set book – and consequently they may try to persuade tutor-counsellors to do the work for them and in some cases demand formal group tuition for most of every session. It is important that tutor-counsellors should be able to take a wider view of their students' development than the students themselves are able to do, with the constant pressure of immediate work.

Study skills

Such a broad view will involve standing back a little from the course itself and considering ways in which individuals and the group are working. Tutor-counsellors will need all their skill to help the group and individual students to improve the organization and method of their studies and they should make quite explicit the reason for doing this. Some time devoted to thinking about, acquiring and practising basic study skills will save students a good deal of time in later years, when they come to deal with more complex and difficult material.* The Open University booklet *How to Study* is a useful working document on which to base group and individual work and further suggestions are given in the *Handbook for Part-Time Tutorial and Counselling Staff*, articles in *Teaching at a Distance*, and books such as Rowntree's *Learn How to Study*.** Students can, therefore, be helped to become aware of the various techniques for reading set books and course units, when to read in depth, when to skim and when perhaps to skip altogether as well as how to take notes on written materials, tutorials and broadcasts, how to use libraries, how to learn in group discussion and above all perhaps how to organize and present their written work. Clearly there is no universally accepted method for acquiring

*See in particular Farnes, N. (1975) 'Student-centred learning', *Teaching at a Distance*, No. 3, and Abercrombie, M. L. J. (1976) 'Paths to Learning', *Teaching at a Distance*, No. 5.

**Rowntree, D. (1970) *Learn How to Study*, MacDonald.

any of these skills and different methods will suit different students.* Equally clearly the introduction of a variety of techniques can be most usefully done when it is linked with the course work.

> In the course D101, *Making Sense of Society*, students are asked at the beginning of Block II to do a reading exercise, using the technique SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review) when studying a set book, Cipolla's *The Economic History of World Population*, and are given specific study objectives for this exercise.

The tutor-counsellor is in a good position to plan to connect the theory and practice of study skills very closely to the work which the students are actually doing. It is likely, at least in the case of some students, that quite a lot of this will need to be done through correspondence teaching.

Correspondence teaching

Most of what has been said in the previous chapter on the work of the course tutor is relevant to the tutor-counsellor's assignment marking: many of the comments quoted are comments on the work of foundation course students and what we have said about the need to get to know students as individuals is very relevant to the tutor-counsellor's task of training students to use their written work and his comments on it as one of their main ways of learning. It is a task which needs a lot of tact and skill; many students in their first year are very lacking in confidence, and for some the submission of the first assignment is a really traumatic experience; and there are some who need help with quite rudimentary skills. Although it is possible to meet many students regularly and to arrange remedial sessions with individuals, a full correspondence teaching job is necessary both because we can never be sure of face-to-face contact with a student and because students have to learn to work alone in their first year so that they can work independently in later years. They need to be encouraged to make full use of their tutor's comments. The tutor-counsellor at foundation level might usefully encourage students to follow a code of good practice, as outlined below, in making constructive use of the marked assignment:

1 Study the comments and advice to see the points that can be made for future improvement;

2 Re-write a section of the assignment to take account of the criticism or advice;

3 Write additional paragraphs or sentences re-working problems or incorporating new ideas or approaches suggested by the tutor;

4 Re-read and re-think sections of the set books or units referred to by the tutor in his comments;

5 Revise notes in the light of comments (i.e. notes from set books, correspondence material, broadcasts). *These notes may be used in later revision*, most obviously for the examination;

6 Study comments to isolate points or questions or items which might be raised with the tutor or another student for further discussion;

7 Revise and study the marked scripts over the academic year so as to re-assess continually progress or academic development, over-coming earlier weaknesses and developing positive abilities.

*For further advice and explanation of techniques see Gibbs, G. and Northedge, A. (1977) 'Learning to study: a student-centred approach', *Teaching at a Distance*, No. 8; Northedge, A. (1975), 'Learning through discussion in the Open University', *Teaching at a Distance*, No. 2, and Hill W. F. (1969) *Learning Thru Discussion*, California Sage Publications.

Group learning techniques

Most tutor-counsellors hold weekly sessions at the study centre during the early months of the course. It is difficult, and possibly not necessary, to make a distinction between 'tutorial' and 'counselling' sessions, at least with foundation level students. In addition to helping their students with the content of the course, tutor-counsellors are responsible for familiarizing them with group study techniques and teaching them how to be self-sustaining.

One of the most important aspects of a university education is the discussion of one's work with fellow students. This occurs informally in all higher educational institutions but because of the part-time nature of Open University study has been formalized in the Open University by encouraging students to form study groups, especially on post-foundation courses where specialist tuition is often available only at a considerable geographical distance. Much of the success of these groups depends on the training which students have received in their foundation year.

The techniques which are appropriate depend on the subject matter and intellectual skills needed for the course and on the composition of the group. In many cases the year can be planned so that the tutor-counsellor plays a leading part early in the year, but ensures that student contributions increase as soon as possible.

It is possible to use a variety of methods to explain why a particular technique is being employed with the material under discussion. Discussion may develop in the course of the year from more or less formal teaching sessions, in which the tutor-counsellor invites contributions by questions, to seminars introduced by various students in turn, and then to student-led discussions which use a structured group discussion method. A large group may be subdivided into smaller groups or pairs. Not all group work need be discussion: science students may be encouraged to get together to work on their home experiments (although actual experimental work is not allowed in most study centres); mathematics students may form small problem-solving groups.

Preparation and planning Whether a group is concentrating on a particular task or discussing a particular section of material there seems little doubt that sessions are most successful when all concerned are committed to preparing for them, using an agreed plan, and are actively involved. Tutor-counsellors need not be involved in discussion all the time: groups can be encouraged to continue on their own while the tutor-counsellor sees individual students or looks in on post-foundation study groups. Groups of students may meet in the weeks between normal study centre sessions and the tutor-counsellor should help them to prepare for such meetings. By making explicit the reasons for planning in the way that he does, the tutor-counsellor can lay the foundation for effective study groups at post-foundation level.

Individual contact

The rapport between a tutor-counsellor and his students is an individual matter and it is fostered in various ways. It needs attention and planning in the study centre context in particular: it is important that the tutor-counsellor should be accessible. This can often be achieved by making it clear to the students that tutor-counsellors are available for consultation at certain times at the study centre. Care and organization can create a situation in which a student can feel that he or she is getting the tutor-counsellor's attention without interruption of, or intrusion upon, group activity.

Individual counselling session

The same is true when communication is by telephone instead of at a meeting. Tutor-counsellors need to make clear to their students at an early stage, when they can be reached by telephone. This is necessary, obviously as a means of self-protection but also as an encouragement to students to use the telephone.* The use of the telephone is treated in more detail in Chapter 4 page 40). The relationship in these many different ways with new students, continues whenever possible when tutor-counsellors retain only their counselling function as students go on to follow post-foundation courses.

All students are in touch with their tutor-counsellor by correspondence, whether they meet at the study centre or not. Through their assignments, letters and telephone conversations a tutor-counsellor can get to know students individually and have a very close insight into their development. Identifying and alleviating difficulties becomes a matter for mutual concern. Letters written at key points in the year, offers of help, words of encouragement at the right time (for example at the time of final registration) can give valuable support to students.

Advice and reminders about administrative matters to those who have shown that they need it, can anticipate and may avoid problems. The means are simple enough, but the use of letters in this way develops a relationship at a distance and establishes the tutor-counsellor as a person who cares about a student's progress and to whom he or she can turn when the need arises.**

Assessment problems

However, the establishment of a sound working relationship may not always be easy. It is as well to be aware that some students may feel apprehensive about approaching their tutor-counsellor with academic difficulties. They may

*For a broader discussion of this area see Short, J. (1974) 'Teaching by telephone: the problems of teaching without the visual channel', *Teaching at a Distance* No. 1 and Odette L'Henry Evans, (1974) 'Teaching bytelephone: some practical observations', *Teaching at a Distance* No. 1.

**See in particular Nicholson, N. (1977) 'Counselling the adult learner in the Open University', *Teaching at a Distance* No. 8.

be afraid to display their ignorance by asking questions in case it indicates to the tutor-counsellor (and in group sessions to other students as well) that they lack knowledge or understanding. Many students worry about assessment and, since the tutor-counsellor grades their assignments as well as acting as a counsellor, some may feel that they are being assessed all the time whether at study centre sessions or in other meetings and conversations. By explaining the precise purpose of the assignments tutor-counsellors can do much to alleviate the understandable fears which adult students may have about submitting their work for criticism, comment and grading to someone whom they have only just met and in whom they may have not yet learned to trust. The emphasis on teaching rather than on assessment has already been discussed in the previous chapter and is particularly important to the work of the tutor-counsellors with foundation course students.

Major aims in the foundation year

The work of the tutor-counsellor with new students is extraordinarily complex and the emphasis will change from year to year according to the perception of student needs. However, it might be useful to offer a brief summary of the objectives which might be achieved by the end of the foundation year. Tutor-counsellors might aim to have:

1 got to know students as individuals and have a means of regular contact with all of them either by meetings at the study centre or by letter or telephone;

2 made sure that students can use the method of learning by correspondence effectively;

3 ensured that students have good study methods in reading, note-taking, writing, organization of their time and materials;

4 ensured that students know how to work in groups and have understood methods which they can use in groups in later years without the direct participation of a tutor-counsellor or course tutors;

5 seen that students understand the administrative system and its place in their life as students;

6 helped, when possible, with non-academic problems which may have been hindering students' progress;

7 kept a record of students' work during the year, contacts with them and notes on problems which have arisen which may continue to cause difficulties in future years;

8 noted students' plans for future courses.

POST-FOUNDATION LEVEL STUDENTS

Continuity

In most cases, when they progress to post-foundation courses, students will remain with the local tutor-counsellor to whom they were allocated in their foundation year. Clearly it would be impossible for this one person to continue with the tutorial and assessment function which exists at foundation level since students will be following a variety of courses, possibly in more than one faculty. At this stage the student's formal tuition is taken over by specialist course tutors. Many post-foundation students are unlikely to have such easy local contact with their tutor or even with other students as they did at foundation level. As the number of post-foundation courses is large and increasing, the number of students on any particular course in any area decreases rapidly as does the availability of local face-to-face tuition.

Transition to higher level studies

Many students find the period of transition to a higher level course difficult. They have been used to getting help locally and quickly and they have to get used to the fact that contact with tutors now has to be mainly by correspondence and telephone and that face-to-face tuition will be available only very infrequently and only in large regional centres, which may take more time and money to attend.

At the same time they are starting a course at higher level which may seem considerably more difficult than their foundation course and which may need an approach which differs from that of their previous course, particularly if it is in a different faculty. Tutor-counsellors are in the best position to help students at this stage.* They will now know most of their students well and will be able to advise them during the period of transition; they represent continuity and stability in a situation which is changing for the students; they can make sure that students understand the function of counselling and tuition at post-foundation level; they are available to help during the period between the end of one course and the beginning of the next. They may, for example, help a student who is likely to have difficulty with a post-foundation course by getting in touch with the course tutor on the student's behalf and so make it easier for the student to get advice early in the year.

Contacting students Even if students do not seem to have particular difficulties, tutor-counsellors should get in touch with them early in the year by letter or at an early study centre meeting and renew this contact as seems necessary at key points in the year (see page 24). It is particularly helpful to encourage post-foundation students to meet in the middle of the year at the time when they are choosing their future courses and to meet them, or at least be in touch by telephone or letter, during the crucial period just before the examinations. Even when students do not seem to need direct help, most seem to welcome evidence that their tutor-counsellor is interested, available and concerned about their continued progress.

Particularly in the early weeks of the year students may experience anxiety about seeking advice and help from their course tutor since in many cases they will not have had an opportunity to meet him. In addition some courses employ more than one course tutor and so contact with individual course tutors may be transitory. Tutor-counsellors can help students to regard their course tutors as teachers and not merely as assessors and encourage them to write or telephone the course tutor when they have difficulties with the academic content of the course.

Special cases It is of course important that tutor-counsellors contact the course tutors early in the year to inform them about students with any particular difficulties known to them. This is essential, for example, in the case of disabled students; the course tutor needs to know about the nature of the student's disability and its effect on the way he or she can work.

> Miss L. is a blind student, who is unable to use Braille. She has to study all the course material by listening to tapes. She either types assignments herself or dictates them to an amanuensis. The tutor-counsellor explains this to the course tutor at the beginning of the year, suggests that it is helpful to the student if comments on assignments are recorded on to cassettes, that the student welcomes frequent contact by telephone and that an early visit to the student at home would be helpful to both tutor and student.

*See in particular Simpson, O. (1977) 'Post-foundation counselling', *Teaching at a Distance* No. 9.

Students who have found their first year studies difficult and who are anxious about their ability to study at second level offer another example of a case where the combination of the counselling and tutorial elements of the system are of prime importance in the educational development of the students.

Contacts with course tutors

As the year progresses course tutors and tutor-counsellors should be in contact with one another over a variety of practical matters affecting their students' progress. Copies of the PT3 forms on which the course tutor comments on the student's assignments and records his grades, are sent to tutor-counsellors, who thus have some contact with all the course tutors concerned with each of their students. They will be able, with some degree of accuracy, to monitor the student's academic progress and will be in a unique position to identify broader academic problems, which may explain why an assignment is below a student's normal standard or submitted late or even not submitted at all. The requirement that a student, who wants to submit an assignment late, must have the tutor-counsellor's authorization to do so is intended mainly as a safeguard for students who are in difficulty. It often ensures that a tutor-counsellor and a course tutor are in touch with each other about potential difficulties, before these become too severe.

Course tutors for their part are encouraged to contact tutor-counsellors when students are having difficulties with assignments and discuss the best course of action for the student. An extra face-to-face or telephone session may be held by the course tutor or by the tutor-counsellor depending on the type of remedial help needed.

> Mrs X, having satisfactorily completed a foundation level course and a second level course in one faculty receives an 'F' grade for her first assignment in another faculty. Naturally she is shocked about this and appeals to the course tutor after consultation with her tutor-counsellor. The basic difficulty is that the student is unable to put together a logical argument is essay form, not that she does not understand the material. The course tutor gives her written advice on how to improve her work, but the next assignment is equally poor. At this stage the course tutor and tutor-counsellor discuss the matter further and the student is asked to prepare a draft for the third assignment and take it to the tutor-counsellor for discussion on presentation and planning even though he is not a specialist in the particular subject. The tutor-counsellor obtains permission for a special session to deal with the matter.

Overcoming isolation

The network of communications involving the regional office, other tutor-counsellors in the same and other study centres and course tutors can be used early in the year to ensure that students following the same course are in touch either in face-to-face groups or by letter or telephone. The tutor-counsellors' responsibility is to see that individuals within their groups are in touch with others and to offer to make this easier by making the initial contacts or by working together with the course tutor. Tutor-counsellors are sometimes able to avoid problems caused by isolation by anticipating them. Without unduly influencing a student's choice of courses a tutor-counsellor can nevertheless encourage foundation course students to consider registering for the same post-foundation courses, thus ensuring the nucleus of a post-foundation study group.

Study groups

Some regions operate a system whereby tutor-counsellors have 'co-ordinating' responsibility for initiating study groups for a number of post-foundation courses.* Students are asked to indicate to the University their willingness to

*An example of such a system is given in: Sewart, D (1975) 'Some observations on the formation of study groups,' *Teaching at a Distance* No. 2.

have their names and addresses released to other students for 'educational purposes'. The role of the tutor-counsellor in relation to these groups is that of a catalyst rather than a teacher. Unlike foundation course groups, working together with tutor-counsellors most of the time, post-foundation study groups consist solely of students working in a group, at whose sessions a tutor-counsellor or course tutor is only infrequently, if ever, present.

The concept which the study groups embody is that of educational process as dialogue, not in the sense of interchange between teacher and student, but of Socratic dialogue, as the pursuit of knowledge by two or more students who advance towards this goal by mutual stimulus. If a study group is to be successful, it demands understanding of this concept and a commitment to it on the part of the students. The tutor-counsellor may help groups to form and to develop an understanding of their objectives and then sustain them by his encouragement.

Methods and content A study group also needs planning and preparation both in method and content. As far as methods are concerned the training and experience which the students have had with their tutor-counsellor in their foundation year (as discussed on page 29), should contribute to the success of a study group. A tutor-counsellor can draw their attention to the guidelines available and help them to choose the methods which are most appropriate for their group and their materials. It is sometimes possible for course teams through course materials to advise students on the most appropriate topics for study group work. Tutor-counsellors may be helpful even when they are not experts in the academic content of the course. The members of study groups are broadly speaking in the same position concerning academic matters and there will be times when groups have difficulty in understanding some of the material which they are studying. Often the difficulty arises from an inability to identify problems and formulate questions. Students, sometimes with the help of a tutor-counsellor, can work together to determine questions which can then be put to the course tutor on behalf of the group.

A criterion for the success of a study group is that its members should have enough confidence in each other to be able to acknowledge freely their own ignorance and uncertainty.* Having done so they can all take part in constructive discussion. Encouragement from a tutor-counsellor can help student groups to develop the confidence which they need. A lot of use is made of the telephone by student groups, not only to consult the course tutor and tutor-counsellor, but also for planning and preparing face-to-face sessions.

Concern for the individual

The personal and broad educational relationship between tutor-counsellor and each student at foundation level remains much the same thoughout the student's University career, although contacts are more infrequent. The information which tutor-counsellors receive enables them to watch the progress of their students and identify potential difficulties. Workload is a problem for many post-foundation level students: many will be following more than one course; and, in extreme cases, students may be taking up to four half-credit courses. As these courses run concurrently, a whole new set of problems emerges and the need for careful planning becomes paramount. For example, assignment due dates may coincide and tutorials may clash. The tutor-counsellor needs to make a special effort to contact students in this category to help them, where necessary, in planning their work and he needs to monitor their progress very

*See in particular Watkins, R. (1975) Co-operative learning in discussion groups, *Teaching at a Distance* No. 2.

carefully to obtain early warning of any difficulties.* Although some students cope quite well, others will need help and may even need to be advised to give up one or more courses.

Tutor-counsellors are concerned not only with their students' programme in any one year but also with the development of their whole degree programme so that they can ensure that their students get advice from specialists when it is needed. Specific course-related problems will, of course, be referred to the appropriate course tutor, but on other matters the tutor-counsellor may advise students to consult outside agencies. This will be the case, as has been noted above (page 27), if a student is considering a change of occupation or further educational opportunities.

Major aims in relation to post-foundation level students

In the previous paragraphs we have noted certain elements of the counselling function. To delineate all these elements is neither possible nor necessarily desirable in a booklet of this nature. Perhaps, however, further light can be thrown on the breadth of the whole function by listing some major responsibilities:

1 to renew contact with all students each year and to keep in touch by meetings, letter and telephone;

2 to help students in the transition from foundation level to higher level work;

3 to monitor progress of all students with the help of information supplied;

4 to be in touch with students' course tutors, particularly in the case of students with special problems;

5 to help the formation of student study groups, advise on methods, help with communication and support during the year;

6 to be aware of and offer advice on students' long-term plans for their degree programme;

7 to refer students for specialist advice when necessary.

ASSOCIATE STUDENTS

Increasing numbers of students are joining the Open University to study a range of different types of courses in the Associate Student Programme. Such students might take courses written as undergraduate courses which are now open to them, or they might study 'purpose built' post-experience and short courses which are not available to undergraduates. They might take a single course, or follow courses in successive years which together form a Diploma, or may take a number of courses which are not linked in such a formal way. Whatever course they are studying, personal advice and help is provided during their entry into and progress within the University.

The backgrounds of associate students are almost as diverse as those of undergraduates, although there is a higher proportion of teachers among them (following courses as part of their in-service training) and a smaller proportion of those with lower educational qualifications. Associate students may need advice, information and counselling support at the time when they make their applications. Further information about courses is sent to applicants in the form of 'course related' notes produced by course teams and the

*For further expansion of this point see Kennedy, D. and Powell, R. (1976) 'Student progress and withdrawal', *Teaching at a Distance* No. 7.

Associate Student Central Office, and each applicant is encouraged to contact his regional office for further advice. In addition, as with undergraduate applicants, regional staff take the initiative to contact those applicants who, from information provided on their application forms, appear as though they might benefit from a discussion with an adviser.

The needs of associate students are in one way similar to those of new undergraduate students as described in the previous section: they must familiarize themselves with the Open University's teaching and learning system quickly enough to follow their course efficiently. In other ways their needs are similar to those of post-foundation students, whose course tutors may be remote, whose tutorials are infrequent and for whom contact with other students may often be difficult. The range of individual difficulties met by undergraduates is found among associate students too. Nor can it be assumed that they will have had recent, if any, previous experience of study at university level. Indeed a category of students requiring considerable help is that of the unsuccessful applicants for foundation courses (because they applied too late) who are taking a course in the Associate Student Programme to avoid 'wasting' a year.

If associate students withdraw from a course they tend to do so before, or soon after, it begins. Those staff responsible for offering them help can be confident that the earlier support is offered, the more effective it is likely to be. Thus, as soon as an associate student is allocated to a member of the part-time staff early contact is important to introduce the student to the Open University system, study centre facilities, and to other students following the same course where this is possible.

Normally counselling help available to an associate student will be provided locally and students will be able to meet the member of staff with a counselling responsibility in their local study centre.

The specialist course tutor, for the majority of students, will not be a local person and students will only have the opportunity of infrequent tutorials in a study centre. Extra help for individuals may of course be suggested by any member of the regional staff, if thought necessary, and resources made available in a similar manner to the undergraduate special support scheme.

The opportunity for group counselling with associate students following a wide range of courses is limited after the initial meeting. The main counselling responsibility is to maintain contact with students as individuals (evidence suggests they welcome this), watch their progress carefully and, where necessary link up with the course tutor to provide extra support when and if appropriate.

We have seen that the main teaching role of the course tutor is discharged through correspondence marking and commenting on the assignment script, and that in the Open University, face-to-face tuition is subordinate to this. It is precisely because of the limitations on class tutorials in the Open University – lack of time, waste of student's time in travel, and so forth – that it is most important not to lose sight of alternatives. There are several ways in addition to assignment marking that a tutor can exercise the tutorial function 'at a distance': use of tutorial letters, tapes, or by telephone. In addition, some tutors will find that they are involved in types of teaching, such as supervising project work, which are not required on all courses. This chapter describes some of these extended or specialised roles that the Open University tutor may find himself involved with.

TUTORIAL LETTERS

The simplest way of extending the face-to-face tuition is by writing tutorial letters. Like correspondence teaching itself, this is an apparently straightforward and obvious idea; but the obvious sometimes needs pointing out, and in any case is capable of considerable development at the hands of experienced tutors. Tutorial letters began by drawing attention to key topics in the course (students often fail to see the wood for the trees and value the sort of summaries that emphasise main points), and by correcting common misunderstandings revealed by the assignments of a number of students. To this one could add an 'advertisement' for the content of forthcoming class tutorials. Many tutors find that their working relationship with their student group becomes more effective if they send out such letters or notices in advance of a tutorial – perhaps especially at the start of the year and after the summer period. Some regional offices are able to help tutors with these. The benefits of structuring a tutorial in advance (but allowing for flexibility on the night) or of circulating to all students points of advice stemming from a common assignment are likely to justify the additional trouble and expense. Here is an example:

> Dear Student,
>
> I have several different points to discuss in this letter and I propose to deal with them in chronological order.
>
> 1 *TMA 02*, most people 'passed' this assignment safely, although the marks were lower than for TMA 01. Don't be sad about this as the assessment question was of a theoretical nature and therefore rather tricky. The point which caused most difficulty was the idea of a reverse mapping. Do notice how this question (q. 1) illustrates that the *domain* of mapping is as important as its rule. I commend to your attention Figure 1 on the accompanying diagram sheet. I hope this shows that the *reverse* mapping of:
> $f: x \mapsto x^2$ $(x \in R)$ is *not* a function
> while that of
> $f: x \mapsto^2$ $(x \in R^+)$ *is* a function.
>
> (*Two detailed paragraphs followed, but have been omitted here.*)
>
> 4 *Non-assessment questions and TMA 03.*
> Try to avoid the temptation of leaving them out, inviting though it is to do so. They are designed as *teaching* questions to stretch you a bit and to add to your understanding. I urge you especially to try TMA 03 q. 3, as it gives you practice in calculating the sort of integral you may well meet subsequently.

5 *Differentiation*
I was going to pick out the important points here but I think this is very well done in the Supplementary Material 1–4 pp. 45–47 (course notes, Unit 4). You can't do better than to read, or re-read, these pages. I would just remind you again that derivatives are USEFUL because $f'(a)$ tells you *the rate at which* f(x) *is changing with respect to* x *at* a.

6 *Next tutorial*
We *are* to have an extra one, at the end of April, as suggested last time. It will be on: *Monday, 28th April, 7.30–8.30 p.m. Room 604.* I propose we discuss topics in the Fund. Th. of Calculus/more difficult integration area but would also like suggestions from you. (Do you want anything on differentiation, for example?) I may distrubute some (optional) examples for you to prepare.

The above example gives a good idea of the friendly, informal approach that can be combined with a lot of practical advice. A second example, this time from an Arts tutor's work, shows more clearly how valuable it can be to draw on the written assignments of the group to pass on useful teaching points.

A291/02: *The Horrible Dinner Party in Petronius and Juvenal*
A slightly higher proportion of students achieved 'A' or 'B' on this assignment than on 01, but there were also a couple of failures. There was a greater spread of grades awarded on this assignment. As before, I am sending you a list of some points that emerged from your work, that I think are of general interest or value.

Plan of essay
Unless you are very confident of yourself, and have good reason not to, it's a good scheme to open with a strong first paragraph, preferably including a statement of your intention and to end with another strong 'punch-line', summing up your view or views on the topic.

Style of essay
We all lack the time we should like to give to things, but certain types of careless error attract attention of the wrong sort: e.g. vagueness 'He saw Society on every level from the inside (!) which probably accounts for his . . . mockery'; contradiction of a judgement made on one page with a diametrically opposite one on the next page, without comment; piling up of words – 'his splendidly biting sarcastic, cynical wit is very satirical'.

On satire and the Satyricon, the units are, I think, very helpful. See especially 15(a), 17, 21(f) and 47–9. Do you agree with Ferguson that Petronius is not truly a satirist, in our sense? Most of you disagreed, and on the whole I found your view convincing. See Arrowsmith, viii–xii, for a last word, noting that he feels P. had a true moral aim. Ferguson himself has an excellent comment at p. 19, on P's ability to make us identify with, yet stand apart from, Encolpius. One student called Petronius 'a strip cartoonist', a striking description, and another compared him, very well, with Smollett. A key aspect of the Satyricon is surely its theatricality, the ways things whizz along from one scene to another, so that the whole story is full of movement.

(*Three similar paragraphs followed.*)

Please note that as I shall be on holiday at the time of the next cut-off date (23.06.75) no 03 assignments will be returned to you from Walton Hall until about the second week in July.

I look forward to meeting you all at the half-day school in Leeds on Saturday, 12th July. If you can come, but have not yet enrolled, please contact the regional office at once.

I am always pleased to hear from any one of you and will answer telephoned or written queries. I am also prepared to meet students living nearby, provided the demands do not become unreasonable.

It will be obvious that these letters require time and thought to prepare, but, quite apart from the introductory letter which many tutors like to write on their own initiative at the beginning of the year, it has proved possible, on low enrolment courses and in areas where student density is low, to pay tutors to produce suitable letters as a partial substitute for (instead of an addition to) the face-to-face tutorial programme. Students apparently value these letters very highly: indeed, in one case a substantial trade (with summer school acting as the market-place) developed in the tutorial notes prepared by one tutor. It was some time before even the tutor discovered this, and much longer before any of the full-time staff knew about it!

TAPED TUTORIALS

A refinement of this technique uses recordings on cassette tapes instead of letters. Quite apart from the obvious advantages on music courses (allowing for the poorer quality of the sound reproduction) this may involve less work than writing a lengthy article. Students on certain courses are required to have a cassette recorder, but it is in any case an increasingly common piece of domestic equipment and, at the time of writing, costs no more than the set books do on some courses.

The taped tutorial scheme as developed for science courses in one region* works as follows. Tutors are supplied with blank cassettes, and a day or two after each tutorial they record thirty to forty minutes summarizing the most important points covered in the tutorial. Some tutors add a page of equations and diagrams to make the commentary easier to follow. The tape and notes are copied at the regional office to provide one copy for each group of four or five students taking part in the scheme and the copy is sent to the first student on the list with a covering letter containing the names and addresses of the other students in that group. The first student listens to the tape and posts it on to the next student in three or four days, and so on; the last student returns the tape to the regional office. Tutors are paid for this form of tutorial as for a standard tutorial session.

The advantages of this scheme are many. Isolated students can receive tutorial help; they can hear the tutor even if they do not have access to a telephone, and they can replay the tape several times over, stopping it when they need time to think, and can even copy it for revision purposes. In addition, it will be cheaper for many students to meet the cost of postage on the tape, and even to buy a cassette recorder, than to journey to a distant study centre.

There are some disadvantages: the information flows only from tutor to student, and the student at the end of the list may suffer some considerable delay. About 50 or 60 per cent of all students apply to be on the tape mailing lists and they are enthusiastic about the scheme.

TELEPHONE CONTACT

For dealing with difficulties of individual students, the telephone can be very useful, and most tutors do in fact give students their telephone numbers. If this is done, it is good practice to suggest at the same time a fixed, short period each week or each fortnight when the tutor is prepared to be telephoned. A blanket invitation creates uncertainty: students are normally

*Haines, R. H. Taped tutorials in science courses. Unpublished paper privately circulated (available from the author, Science Staff Tutor, Yorkshire Region).

reluctant to intrude into their tutor's spare time, though some might be over-demanding, and specificity makes the contact more business like.

Students participating in a telephone tutorial

As well as telephone calls prompted by a student's particular problem, some experiments have been conducted in giving telephone tutorials where a student rings the tutor, at the Open University's expense, at a set time for a tutorial. More promisingly, a number of study centres are equipped with loud-speaking telephones and these can be used either to link a group of students in a small study centre to a large centre where the main tutorial is taking place, or as part of a conference call network where there may be one or more students at each of a number of telephones. Students (and the tutor) may even use their own telephone instead of using one in a study centre.

The main advantage of telephone tutorials over taped tutorials is that it enables a two-way conversation to take place between tutor and student. It is, however, rather expensive, and it is not easy to make effective use of the time. There is always the problem of making sure that one is understood – and this can be quite difficult in courses which use diagrams and mathematical symbols and thus necessitate a very disciplined approach. In addition, there is the problem of identifying the speakers whenever more than two people are involved, and of ensuring that one or more participants have not been reduced to mere listeners – or even cut off altogether. But in some courses it has proved of value, and the Open University has prepared a booklet* to advise students and tutors how to use the system effectively. Tutors asked to conduct group telephone tutorials are sent copies of this booklet.

*Handbook on the use of telephones.

The specialisms discussed so far might be applied to any course where low enrolment or low population density is a problem. There are further specialisms which are required on certain courses, and perhaps the type of tutorial work evoked by the word 'project' is the most obvious. Projects in the Open University vary from a straightforward survey of attitudes or opinion, using techniques described in the course to collect and analyse the data and to present the results, to much more ambitious tasks which extend over a long period. These projects may involve the tutor in advising the student on the choice of a suitable topic, and commenting on a first, preliminary stage of the work so that his criticism can be borne in mind when the student finally plans the details of his project and does not waste time and effort in unprofitable work or even in gross errors. Much of the tutor's work is similar in kind to that done in assignment marking, but it differs in degree and usually involves him in giving more individual attention than more conventional assignments require. It is generally expected that part-time staff tutoring courses with a substantial project element will have had experience of supervising projects before, preferably at post-graduate level.

These projects, in spite of the demands they make, have been popular with tutors and have been felt to represent a more satisfying level of academic work than conventional essays or problems can possibly do when set in assignments, as well as being perhaps more suitable for teaching adult students. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the Open University might possibly have felt unable to use projects had it not been for the encouragement that it received from some of the more experienced part-time staff.

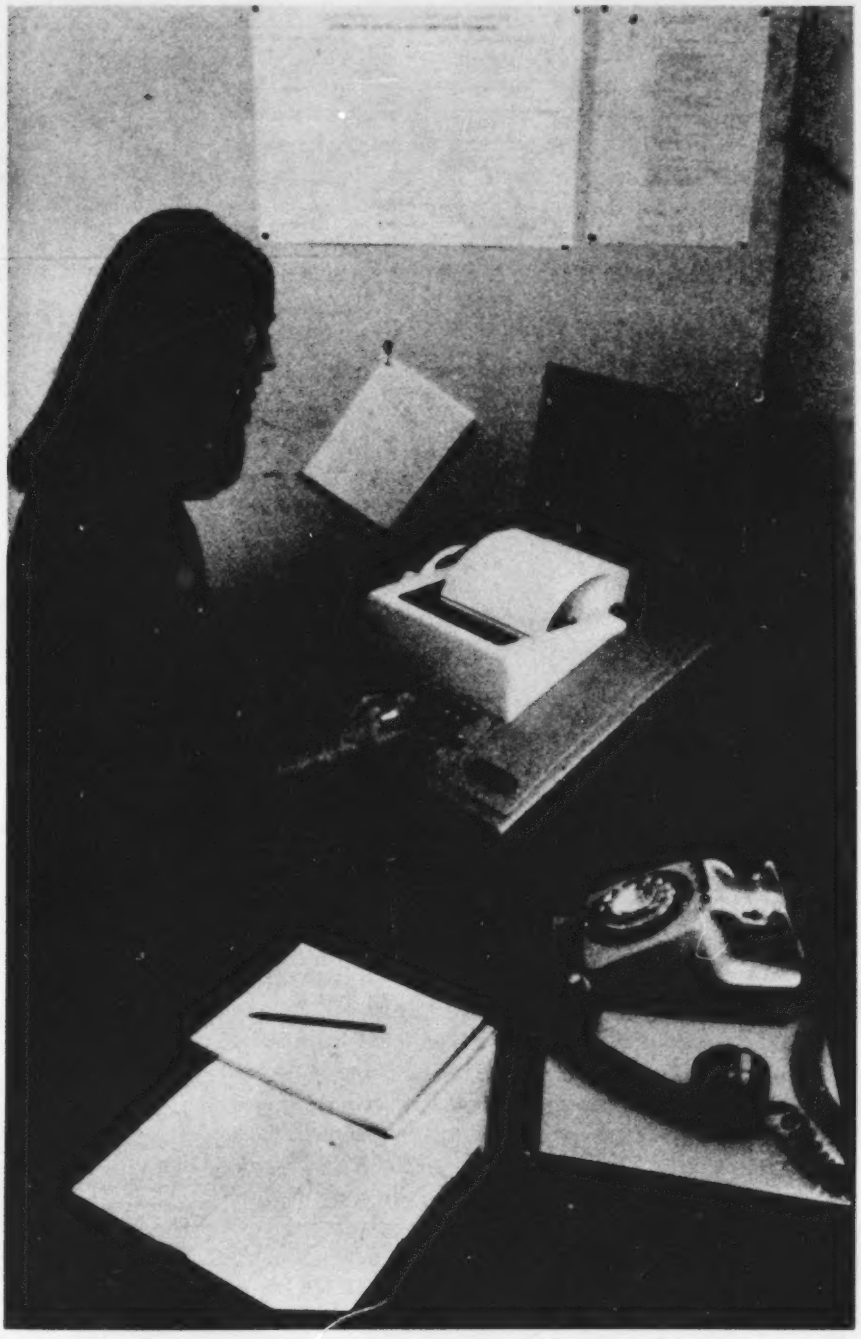
The merits of this type of assessment have persuaded the Technology Faculty to try a course which will consist entirely of a project. This is intended to provide students either with a preliminary experience of research work, or alternatively to involve them in the process of design or a similar integrative activity. This 'course' is an important new step: it has no written course units, and lacks many other features of conventional courses. However, it poses new problems for its tutors, who will probably need to have had experience in supervising projects and research work. The continuous assessment consists of an initial report in March, followed by an interim report in mid-summer, both of which will be graded and commented on by the tutor. The final report, in October, forms the main component of assessment for credit and will be graded by the tutor and a full-time member of the Open University. An oral examination on the project replaces the conventional written examinations, and the various grades will be conflated to decide whether a credit should be awarded.

Thus on this course the tutor will be crucial. Apart from some written material which advises students on the general principles of choosing and doing projects, supplemented by some guidance on suitable 'areas' for project work, the tutor's guidance, particularly in the early stages, will be all the help the student can get. As a result, tutors will probably not be able to cope with more than three students a year; in many cases they may well have only one.

STUDENT COMPUTING SERVICE

The Student Computing Service is an important element in the Open University teaching system. Students following courses which involve computing can use terminals in most study centres, while remote students can make use of the special postal service. Since the service is operated by full-time staff, it may seem that tutors have little part to play. However, quite apart from the

work done by many tutor-counsellors in demonstrating the use of study centre terminals, it is important for tutors on a course involving computing to be able to give advice on how the computing work fits in with the academic work of the course. There are two main aspects of this. One is the question of the importance of the computing component and where it should be done, and this is dealt with in the course material. The other is not so obvious: attempts



Computer terminal being used at a study centre

by the student to do the computing work often fail not so much because the student cannot cope with the machinery – though this is common enough, and tutors with experience in computing, as opposed to experience in *teaching* computing should beware of minimising the difficulties to students – but because the student has failed to understand properly some part of the course material and this is what has brought about the apparent difficulty in computing. This type of problem is one where the tutor is the best person to help, as the academic problem will probably be unsuitable for the computing adviser to deal with.

Even if – especially if – the computing work is not an important element of the course, the tutor has a major responsibility in developing the student's attitude towards the computer. If the tutor is uninterested, the student may dismiss it too. A feature of computing work that tutors must bear in mind is that, unlike most other course materials, computer programmes are changed and extended quite frequently during the life of a course. To give some examples on some courses the answers to computer-marked assignments (CMAs) are available on the Student Computing Service system together with material which diagnoses the causes of errors in the student's answers. Students may obtain this information at the study centre, or through the postal service (a fact which escapes many students' attention just as does the advantage to an unskilled typist or student of using the postal service to enter *and then store* for future use large amounts of data). Other progress with computer aided instruction is being made: quite sophisticated packages (for example Computer-assisted Learning (CAL) in chemistry courses) are available to help students master fundamental concepts. The programme asks questions which the student can answer in his own words: the computer performs a lexical analysis to see if the answer is correct. If not, it directs the student to appropriate remedial material.

For these kinds of reasons it is increasingly necessary for tutors to be at least informed of developments in the computing area, though they themselves need not be computing specialists. This does present problems for tutors, just as some inter-disciplinary courses present problems.

Advice is always available from the computer adviser, whose phone number is given by each computer terminal, and the regional office can give information about access to terminals and passwords to enable the system to be used. In addition, special efforts are made to offer appropriate training to tutors involved with courses which have a computing element.

CONCLUSION

It will be clear from what has been said that teaching in the Open University is already complex, perhaps more complex than in conventional institutions. Developments are still taking place which will improve the teaching but which will inevitably make it harder to get an overall picture of the various methods used. To mention two which will have as yet unknown implications for the tutors: the new mathematics foundation course uses 'talking book' tape cassettes to replace parts of the text and talk the students through problems. Will this prepare the way for tutors to rewrite parts of the course in the light of experience, something often advocated but previously impossible because of our production methods? Again, it is proposed that, in a new course the teaching of system analysis will require tutors to act out a role such as managing director in a large firm so that the student can play the part of analyst. This method of training is used elsewhere, but adapting it to the Open University will require innovation, and we may be sure that Open University tutors will once again be in the forefront of progress as they have so often been in the past.